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Beyond Information: College Choice as a Literacy Practice

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by

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Abstract

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Every year more than two million high school seniors prepare for and apply to college. These students visit college websites, write college admission essays, complete online application forms and use digital literacy tools to elicit and share knowledge about college. These literacy practices are central to the college choice process. Nonetheless, few scholars have examined how these practices are experienced by students or framed by the schools these students attend. Guided by Gee's Discourse theory, this study examines how a group of 14 high school seniors who attended a high poverty high school in the Bronx, New York developed the knowledge, skills and attitudes associated with the college choice process. Findings from the study are based upon a one-year ethnographic study and subsequent interviews with student participants. Data sources included surveys, digital and printed documents, photographs, observations, interviews and focus groups. Students reported that their high school played a central role in their college choice process. Staff at the school organized during-school workshops, after-school events, college fairs and visits to local colleges. Staff introduced students to college-going texts and helped students to interpret these texts and compose their own college-going texts. These discursive practices helped students to learn about and engage in the college choice process. Nonetheless, students experienced multiple challenges as they engaged in the process of deciding whether and where to attend college. Findings from the study point to a number of literacy

practices and organizational structures that were instrumental in both supporting students through the college choice process and in hindering opportunity. The dissertation ends with a discussion of implications for practice, policy, and theory.

Acknowledgments

The writing of this dissertation, like all literacy practices, was a social endeavor. I was

able to complete this project because of the love of friends and family and the support of

colleagues and educational institutions. It is my pleasure to acknowledge these individuals and

institutions here. I want to begin by thanking the students, teachers, and counselors at Genevieve

Brooks High School, as well as the school's college coach and principal. You welcomed me to

your school and trusted me to provide an honest account of the work you were doing. To the

students, thank you for sharing your stories and your insights, and to the adults, thank you for the

important, and often difficult, work you do every day. This project would have been impossible

without you.

At the CUNY Graduate Center I was fortunate to find a community of scholar-

practitioners from whom I could learn and with whom I could grow. First, I would like to thank

my chair Nick Michelli who excels at creating community among his students and who has

reminded me throughout that an education that does not foreground social justice and democratic

participation is not much of an education at all. Throughout this project I knew I always had you

on my side and for this I thank you. Thanks as well to my other committee members, Alberto

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who has challenged me throughout this project to probe ever deeper. Thanks as well to Steve

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hows of literacy analysis, and to the late Jean Anyon whose pathbreaking scholarship has meant

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and whose applied research is helping schools across New York City advance the cause of educational justice. Thanks especially to Lori, who invited me to join in this work.

At the Graduate Center I also benefitted from the friendship and counsel of my fellow students. A million thanks to my friends and research group members Bisola Neil, Joanna Yip and Susan McCullough—your wisdom, moral support, friendship, and critical feedback has made all the difference. Go Team GOST/GTFO! Thanks as well to Jonathan Davis, a good friend who has read and critiqued much of this manuscript. Edwin Mayorga, you've been the humble pater familias of the Urban Ed. Department; thanks for your guidance and wise counsel. Alejandro Carrión, your scholarship is inspirational; may we continue working together into the future. Finally I want to recognize Noah Heller, an educator and scholar who has stuck close as a brother throughout this long journey. Thank you.

Many years ago I took a class with Dr. Su Yon Pak, my first class as a Master's student at Teachers College. One day Dr. Pak returned an assignment I had submitted. In the margin was a note that said, "Have you ever considered pursuing a doctorate? You should." Dr. Pak, thank you for seeing something in me that I didn't know was there. Thanks as well to my other professors at TC, Ruth Vinz, Chris Higgins, and Michelle Knight (who I would later meet as a doctoral student).

Above all, I want to thank my family. I was raised in a family that valued learning and social justice and these twin ideals have inspired a great deal of this dissertation. Thank you to my mother, Marguerite Greenfield, for your endless support and for showing me what a life dedicated to justice and equality looks like. To my father, Daniel Greenfield, thank you for everything. As I think through how to build a career that combines research and practice I need look no further than your own life as an example. My second pair of parents, Susan and Ed

Preface

One morning in the fall of 2012, I walked to the front of a small auditorium on the second floor of a high school in the Bronx. There were about 100 seniors seated before me. They were quiet, waiting to hear what I had to say. I didn't record myself, but my spiel sounded something like this:

> *Hello. My name is Jeremy Greenfield, and this year I will be conducting a study at your school. The purpose of the study is to figure out how students—students like you—learn about college and the college application process. I want to know what students think, what they know, what they believe, and how they go about choosing colleges. You see I used to be a high school English teacher here in the Bronx so this is something I've thought about a lot over the years. I'm here today to ask you if you would like to volunteer to participate in the study. I have information right here, and in a minute I'm going to stand over there by the wall. Anyone who thinks they might be interested, come on over and I'll tell you about it. Thanks.*

To say I was swarmed is an exaggeration. Still, it felt that way. By the time I reached the wall there was already a small group of students waiting for me. In just a few minutes I was out of flyers. Thirty students signed up to attend an information session that I would be holding a few days later. Not all the students who wrote their names down that morning would end up participating in the study. But most of the students who did join the study were there from the beginning. Nabella, Vivian, Royal, Yessica and the others—I can still remember them asking how they could get involved. At the time, I was surprised that so many students were interested in participating in a study with a man they didn't know. I shouldn't have been. Though I didn't know it at the time, these students had been engaged in the college choice process for quite some time, and they wanted someone to talk to about it.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Every year more than two million high school seniors in the United States participate in what scholars refer to as the college choice process (Bergerson, 2009; NCES, 2014). These students read flyers and brochures that are sent to their homes. They fill out online applications, use Facebook to share ideas and concerns with friends and sit at home writing and rewriting their college admission essay. They meet with private college counselors, take SAT classes on weekends and, along with their parents, go on tours of private colleges that cost upwards of $50,000 per year. But not all students. The college choice process differs depending upon who the applicant is, who her parents are, and where she goes to high school, among other factors. Is she filling out her application from the comfort of her bedroom, in a loud urban classroom, or in a group home that she shares with other homeless families? Does she have someone who can help her read, interpret and compose the *texts* (college application forms, financial aid documents, SAT documents, transcripts, college essays, etc.) that mediate the high school-to-college transition? Does she believe that she can afford to go to college? If there are more than two million high school seniors who participate in the college choice process in a given year, there may be upwards of two million college processes.

Bergerson (2009) has defined college choice as "the processes through which students determine whether and where to go to college and the factors that influence these processes" (p. 1). One important factor is what might be called *identity work* ("Am I the kind of person who goes to college? Do I want to be this kind of person? Does the future me—the imagined college student me—align with the present me?"). A second is *cost-benefit analysis* ("Is it 'worth it' to attend college? If I attend college locally, will I be more or less likely to find success and

ultimately graduate? How much debt is too much?"). A third is *social context* ("Should I pursue a path similar to those around me? Do I have the social support necessary to attend, and ultimately complete, college?"). If we foreground the identity work involved in college-going we are likely to approach college choice from a psychological perspective. If we foreground the costs and benefits associated with college we are likely to approach college choice from an economic perspective. Finally, if we foreground the social forces involved in college-going we are likely to take on a sociological perspective. Indeed, these three approaches—the psychological, the economic, and the sociological—constitute the dominant disciplinary approaches to the subject. Each of these approaches is valuable and has helped today's researchers gain important insight into the college-going process. And yet, for reasons I explain below, I have chosen to do something a bit different in this dissertation.

In the present study I use a Discourse framework (Gee, 2008) to examine the college choice process. I do this not because the more common approaches are inferior or somehow wrong, but because emphasizing language and literacy will enable me to: foreground the multiple texts and literacies involved in college choice; discuss the ways in which literacy and related social practices differ by context; and show how written and oral discourse reflect and reaffirm cultural realities. Texts (e.g., the college admission essay, the college application, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, a Facebook message between friends, a poster on the wall) and literacies (e.g., digital literacy, academic literacy, financial literacy) are central to college choice. What people say, and how they say it, is central to college choice—as are textually-mediated experiences like college fairs and college interviews. And yet, college choice scholars have thus far refrained from treating the college choice process as a literacy practice. Their emphasis, as I note above, has been elsewhere. Before we examine the college choice

literature however, I would like to provide some background and context to this study. Specifically, what is the state of college access and opportunity in the second decade of the 21st century in the United States of America?

College Access and Opportunity

It [The Higher Education Act of 1965] means that a high school senior anywhere in this great land of ours can apply to any college or any university in any of the 50 States and not be turned away because his family is poor.
—President Lyndon Baines Johnson, on the signing of the Higher Education Act of 1965, November 8, 1965

Over the past fifty years college participation has expanded considerably in the United States (Fischer & Hout, 2006; Karen & Dougherty, 2005; NCES, 2014). For example, in 1965, the year President Johnson traveled to his alma mater, Southwest Texas State College, to sign the Higher Education Act, 5.9 million students attended American postsecondary institutions. By 2011 that number had swelled to 21 million (NCES, 2013a, Table 221). In addition to the *number* of students participating in college since the Johnson Administration, the *percentage* of students attending college and completing college has also increased. In his "Remarks Upon Signing the Higher Education Act of 1965," Johnson noted that about half of high school graduates went on to college. In 2012, 66% of students who graduated from high school in the spring immediately transitioned to college (NCES, 2014). And in 2013, a record 33.6% of young adults (ages 25 to 29) had attained a bachelor's degree, compared to 11% of young adults in 1960 and 16.4% in 1970 (NCES, 2013b, Table 104.20). If we include all postsecondary degrees (and we should, since subbaccalaureate, baccalaureate, and graduate degrees are all valuable to individuals and society alike), the percentage of adults ages 25-34 with a postsecondary degree rises to 43 (OECD, 2013a, Chart 1A.1).

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Groups who have been historically underrepresented in higher education such as African Americans, Latina/os, students from low-income families, veterans and immigrants have particularly benefitted from this expansion of opportunity and access. For example, African American enrollment doubled between 1980 and 2009 and Hispanic enrollment increased fivefold during the same period (Bowen, Kurzweil & Tobin, 2005; NCES, 2011). And yet, in 2014, nearly fifty years since the passage of the Higher Education Act of 1965, low-income youth and youth of color, particularly African Americans and Latina/os, continue to have disproportionately low college participation and completion rates (Perna & Kurban, 2013). While the college enrollment gap between whites and African Americans has declined over the past 30-40 years, the gap between whites and Hispanics (Latina/os), and between high-income and low-income students has not (Long, 2013). Between 1975 and 2012, for example, the gap in immediate college enrollment between high-income and low-income students has risen from 29% to 29.4% (NCES, 2013a, Table 302.3; Figure 1.1). According to some estimates, it is not just the gap in college enrollment that is on the rise; the gap in college persistence and completion between children from high- and low-income families is also rising (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011; Nichols, 2011), a phenomenon that reflects a national trend of growing economic inequality (Alvaredo, Atkinson, Piketty & Saez, 2013; Stiglitz, 2012).

Skeptics like to point out that a college degree is not necessary for many lines of work and that policies that encourage all students to pursue postsecondary education may unwittingly saddle more and more students with debt. As it is, student debt has topped one trillion dollars. Nonetheless, the arguments in favor of expanding access to higher education are overwhelming. Higher education brings economic and noneconomic returns to individuals and society alike.

Immediate College Enrollment by Income Level
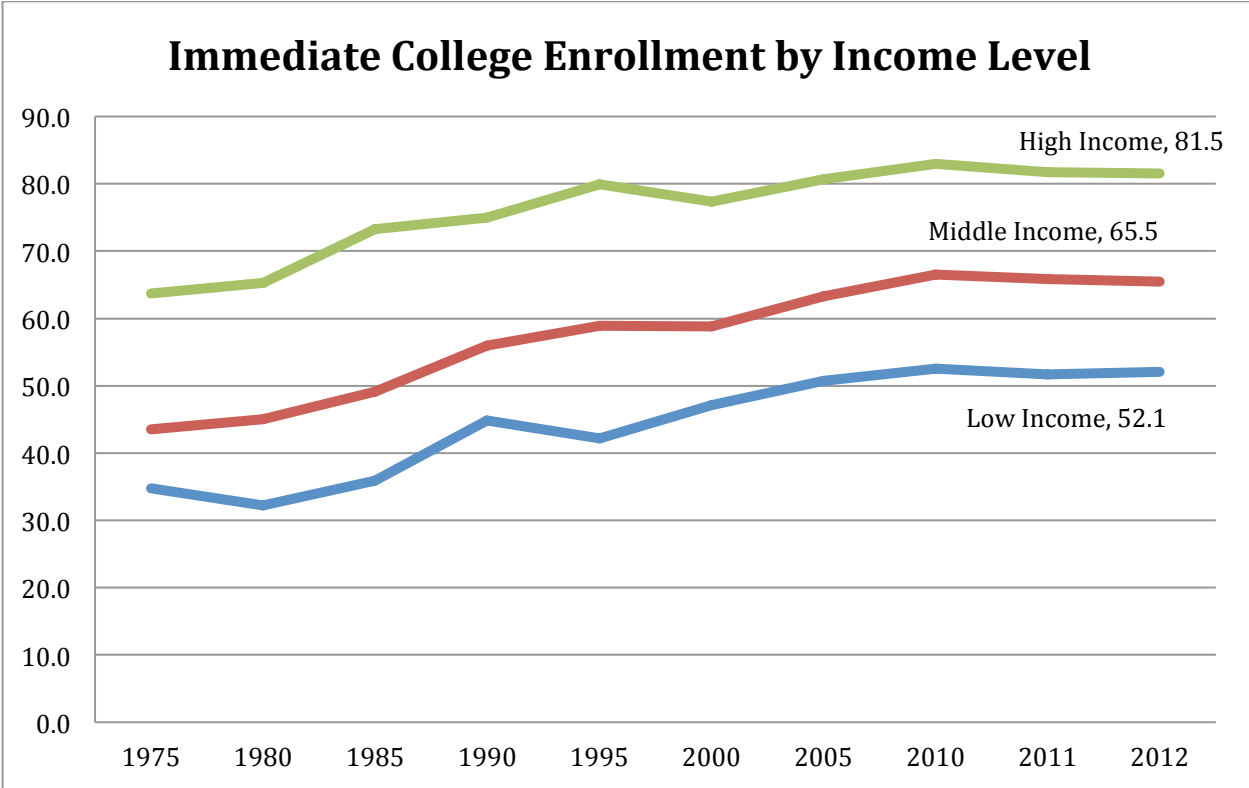
Figure 1.1 Percentage of recent high school completers enrolled in 2-year and 4-year colleges, by income level: 1975 through 2012 (Source: NCES, 2013A, Table 302.3)

The economic benefits of higher education that accrue to individuals, while perhaps not the most important, are the most frequently discussed. On average, the more education you attain, the more you earn. Workers with some college experience (but who have not graduated) earn more than students with no college experience. Those with Associate's and Bachelor's degrees earn, on average 27% and 65% more per year, respectively, than full time workers with only a high school diploma (Baum, Ma & Payea, 2013). While students with a Bachelor's degree usually make more than students with Associate's degrees, an analysis of recent college

graduates in Arkansas, Colorado, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia found that students who graduated with technical Associate's degrees often earned more than students with a Bachelor's degree in their first year after graduation (Schneider, 2013). This analysis suggests that there is a real economic payoff for community college graduates who enter high-demand fields. Finally, the economic advantage of education increases over time. Using Census data, Carnevale, Rose, and Cheah (2011) showed that over a lifetime individuals with a Bachelor's degrees make 84% more than workers with just a high school degree.

Furthermore, the earnings associated with more schooling have increased over time, leading to what scholars refer to as the *college premium*. While real earnings of high school graduates have fallen in recent decades, the earnings of the college-educated have risen markedly (Autor, 2014). Perhaps most importantly, the economic benefits of college are not ephemeral. Scholars have long documented the ways in which the wealthy pass on their privilege to their children. However, before Attewell and Lavin (2007) conducted their landmark study we did not know if the same held true for students of low-income backgrounds. Today, we know that when students from low-income families go to college, the economic benefits they experience are passed on to future generations.

Going to college is about more than money. Going to college offers individuals the opportunity to engage with new ideas and new people. College provides an opportunity to learn new skills and hone skills developed earlier. Attending college is also associated with improved quality of life for oneself and one's children, increased job satisfaction, and increased social standing (Williams & Swail, 2005). College attendance is also associated with health benefits like lower rates of smoking and obesity and higher rates of exercise (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010). Individuals who attend college tend to have longer, healthier lives. These studies do not suggest

that attending college *causes* any of these outcomes. It is certainly possible to graduate from college in debt, overweight and addicted to nicotine. However, such outcomes are less likely for college-goers than those who do not attend college.

The benefits associated with higher education accrue not only to individuals, but society at large. Citing a study by the Institute for Higher Education Policy, Williams and Swail (2005) note that investment in higher education is associated with "increased tax revenues, greater productivity, increased consumption, increased workforce flexibility, and decreased reliance on government assistance" (p. 14). Increases in higher education are also associated with higher rates of voting, charitable giving, and volunteerism, and lower rates of incarceration (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010; Williams & Swail, 2005).

Many scholars agree that college access remains a problem in the United States—and particularly for low-income students and students of color. The question, therefore, is not *if* we should take steps to help students prepare for and enter college. The question is *how*. To address this question I will review two bodies of literature: college choice and literacy.

Relevant Literature

This dissertation is rooted in two discrete, though complementary, bodies of literature. The first, college choice, examines the processes involved in choosing whether and where to go to college. College choice scholars, as I will explain below, use a variety of methods and theories to examine why some students attend college and why others do not. Among nonspecialists, college choice is frequently thought of as something that happens during the spring of one's senior year. The scholars who have examined this topic in depth suggest that there is a lot more to it than this. The second body of literature I examine in this dissertation is

that of literacy. Unlike college choice, which is a relatively new field, literacy has ben studied

for far longer. In *The Phaedrus*, for example, Plato devotes the final portion of the dialogue to

literacy. By the end of the dialogue, Socrates has convinced his interlocutor, Phaedrus, that

writing—when compared with oral discourse—is deeply problematic. "Even the best of

writings," Socrates argues, "are but a reminiscence of what we know" (Plato, c370BCE/1952, p.

140). For Socrates, the discourse that matters most is oral.

Although Hellenic conceptions of literacy remain of interest, this dissertation will have

little more to say about historical conceptions of literacy. In fact, because I approach literacy

from a "sociocultural perspective" (Gee, 2000; Perry, 2012), few of my citations regarding

literacy will precede the 1980s, the decade during which the field first developed (Gee, 2000).

College Choice

Educational scholars began pursuing the topic of college choice in the 1960s. Since that

time the field has changed in important ways, and today a new generation of scholars is pushing

the field in new directions. In this section I will begin by introducing some of the terms that I

will use throughout this dissertation. I will then examine the methodological and theoretical

approaches college choice scholars have adopted. I will conclude the section by reviewing some

of the most important factors that affect college choice.

Kress (2010) has remarked that the terms we choose to employ and how we employ them

have political and theoretical ramifications. In addition, there is the matter of clarity. The writer

wants the words she or he chooses to convey a particular idea and not another. It is with this in

mind that I introduce a few key terms. The first is college. In this dissertation college will refer

to any postsecondary institution that grants degrees. While for some, the word *college* evokes

ivy-clad stone buildings set among expansive greenswards, here the word refers to the many ways in which college is lived in the twenty-first century in America. Thus, the term includes private four-year schools, public four-year schools, community colleges, online degree-granting institutions, private for-profit colleges and other postsecondary institutions where one can earn a postsecondary degree or a certificate. The federal government refers to such institutions as Postsecondary Title IV Institutions (in reference to Title IV of the Higher Education Amendment of 1992). During the 2010-2011 school year there were 4,706 degree-granting postsecondary Title IV institutions in the United States (NCES, 2013a, Table 306).

There are also a number of phrases used by scholars, policymakers and educators to speak about the movement from secondary school to college. I have already provided a definition for *college choice*: "the processes through which students determine whether and where to go to college and the factors that influence these processes" (Bergerson, p. 1). This dissertation will follow the custom of scholars (see for example, McDonough, 1997 and Perna, 2006) who use college choice as an umbrella term to include processes such as the college preparation, application, and financial aid process. And so, while college preparation and application can *precede* the act of choosing a college, both are thought to be a *part of* the process as well. It is worth noting that there is something unsettling in the phrase, *college choice*. This phrase seems to suggest that all students have the choice of whether or not to go to college. This is not always the case, as data from this study will demonstrate.

Two other phrases that will be used in this dissertation are *college access* and *college readiness*. College access is a phrase closely associated with higher education scholars and practitioners. These scholars and practitioners seek to know how open postsecondary schools are. What are these schools—and surrounding institutions—doing to support students who have

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been historically excluded from institutions of higher education? Because the college

completion rate in the United States is so low[1], and because completion rates differ dramatically

by race and class, scholars are increasingly drawing attention to college graduation rates. Thus,

writers today frequently speak of college access and *success*, where success stands for

completion. If the phrase *college access* is most frequently conjoined to a college or university,

the phrase *college readiness* is most frequently tied to a high school student. The phrase *college*

readiness came to be used because scholars noted a gap between what a student needed to get

into college and what she needed to succeed once she arrived (Conley, 2010). The idea behind

college readiness is that access is not enough. One needs to be "ready" to succeed once you have

arrived. But what does *ready* mean? There is no universally accepted definition of college

readiness, but many organizations and institutions measure college readiness by creating an

index or composite variable. If a student's score is at or above a cut score she is thought to be

ready. If she is below level, she is said to require remediation. To measure so-called readiness,

the New York City Department of Education created a College Readiness Index (CRI). As

Siskin (2013) writes,

> In 2012, that index included several benchmarks: graduation with a Regents Diploma;
>
> scores of 75 or above on the ELA Regents and 80 or above on a Math Regents; or
>
> minimum scores of 480 on both math and verbal SATs; or minimum scores of 20 on both
>
> math and English ACTs ; and completion of courses the department has "certified"
>
> rigorous enough to be college preparatory. Overall, only 29 % of the students who

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[1] Using data from 2011, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) found that of the students who entered "Tertiary Type A Universities" (4-year colleges), only 53% graduated within 6 years. (OECD, 2013a, Chart A4.1). This compares unfavorably with other countries. Of the 23 countries studied, only Hungary fared worse.

[2] There is expansive literature on college costs. While I briefly review this literature here, a more thorough review is presented in chapter 7.

[3] The centrality of counselors to the college choice process is further developed in chapter 5.

entered high school four years earlier met this CRI benchmark of readiness in 2012 (pp. 4-5).

Thus, the CRI suggests that what it takes to be "ready" for college is academic preparedness and nothing more. This is a surprising assertion and one that is challenged by Arnold, Lu and Armstrong (2012). Arnold, Lu and Armstrong (2012) write that college readiness is best thought of as "an umbrella term that refers to the multidimensional set of skills, traits, habits, and knowledge that students need to enter college with the capacity to succeed once they are enrolled" (p. 2). This, it seems to me, is both a more accurate and helpful conception of the phrase. Finally, I will also use the phrase *college-going process* (Knight et al., 2004) throughout this dissertation. This is used interchangeably with the phrase *college choice process*.

Methodological approaches to college choice. The earliest college choice studies were largely quantitative in orientation (Hossler, Braxton, and Coopersmith, 1989; Paulsen, 1990). In fact, in one of the earliest college choice literature reviews, Paulsen (1990) exclusively discusses quantitative studies. While these early researchers employed a wide variety of secondary data analysis models (e.g., linear regression, logit, probit and discriminant models), none of these approaches can provide the perspectives of the individuals most impacted by secondary and postsecondary educational policies: the students themselves. Since Paulson's 1990 literature review there have been a number of qualitative studies that have addressed college choice (e.g., Bloom, 2007; Carrión, 2014; Chajet, 2006; Knight & Marciano, 2013; McDonough, 1994; Pérez & McDonough, 2008). According to Bergerson (2009), however, quantitative approaches to the study of college choice are still dominant.

Theoretical approaches to college choice. College choice scholars have also adopted a variety of theoretical approaches to the subject. According to Paulsen (1990), from the late

1960s to the late 1980s the majority of college choice research was informed by one of three disciplinary orientations: sociology, economics, and psychology. Drawing upon theories of status attainment, sociological studies of this period emphasized how groups of individuals were positioned in society and how this positioning affected educational aspirations and college selection. Drawing upon theories of rational choice, economic analyses of the period described "college-going behavior as a manifestation of an investment-like decision-making process" (Paulsen, 1990, p. 7). For example, economic analyses of the period showed that students were more likely to attend college when tuition is lower, when financial aid is greater and when the distance between a student's home and college is shorter. Finally, psychological approaches to college choice emphasize factors such as the ways in which parents can influence the educational aspirations of their children, as well as the psychological climate of a college and how this climate impacts students' college-going behaviors.

While these theoretical approaches to the study of college choice have withstood the test of time, additional theories have been used as well. Among the most influential theorists in the fields of college access and college choice (and beyond, to be sure) is Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977/1990; Bourdieu, 1986/2007). McDonough (1994, 1997) was among the first scholars to draw on his theories of habitus, capitals and field and in recent years many other scholars have similarly foregrounded his theoretical perspective (see, for example, Bloom, 2007; Carrión, 2014; Stephan, 2013). Like Bourdieu, these scholars have attended carefully to the intersecting forces of social class, ideology and social structures in the high school to college transition. In a recent monograph, Arnold, Lu and Armstrong (2012) approach the concept of *college readiness* through the lens of human ecology theory, a framework developed by the developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner. And Knight and Marciano (2013) draw on

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Ladson-Billings' (1994) theory of culturally relevant pedagogy in their study of college-bound Black and Latina/o youth. Clearly, theoretical approaches to college choice have expanded considerably in recent decades.

College choice models. Quantitative social researchers employ statistical models to analyze the relationship between variables. Because quantitative researchers have dominated college choice research, there has been substantial attention paid to the use of models. The most influential model in the field was developed by Hossler and Gallagher (1986). Building on the work of previous scholars, Hossler and Gallagher (1987) operationalize college choice as a linear process involving three stages: predisposition, search and choice. During the first stage—predisposition—students determine whether or not they want to go to college. According to Cabrera and La Nasa (2000) students typically go through the predisposition phase during grades seven to nine. During the second stage—search—students determine "the group of institutions to which [they] will apply" (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987, p. 209). Students are believed to go through the search phase during grades 10-12 (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). During the final stage—choice—students select the college they will ultimately attend, a stage that occurs between grades 11-12 (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

Over the past twenty years a number of scholars have drawn on Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model in an effort to determine what factors have the greatest impacts on the various stages of the model. For example, in a 2002 study by Bers and Galowich (see Bergerson, 2009, pp. 31-32) the authors draw on the three-stage model to explore the college choice process of community college students. The authors found that students who began their college search process earlier were less likely to attend community college. In addition, the authors found that students' friends and families had a smaller effect on their college-choice behaviors than their

socioeconomic status. More recently, however, the Hossler and Gallagher model has been the subject of critique. While the model presents college choice as a universal process, increasing numbers of scholars are drawing attention to the fact that the Hossler and Gallagher model does not apply equally well to all students. Because students who have been historically underrepresented in institutions of higher education do not have the same access to college advisement, they do not follow the same path as students from more privileged backgrounds. As Levine and Nidiffer (1996) and Ceja (2001) have demonstrated, students from low-income families are unlikely to begin thinking about whether or not they will attend college in the seventh grade. For these students, the process begins much later. The failure of the Hossler and Gallagher model to fully account for all potential college-goers has led a number of scholars to develop alternative models (see, for example, Tierney & Venegas, 2009, Hendrickson, 2002; and Perna, 2006).

Among the most promising of these models is Perna's (2006) contextual model of college choice. Rather than treating college choice as a linear process, Perna (2006) describes college choice as a series of decisions that are affected by four interconnected contexts: the social, economic, and policy context; higher education context; school and community context; and the context of habitus. Like Carrión (2014) and McDonough (1994), Perna (2006) argues that students' educational decisions are determined, at least in part, by their *habitus*, a construct that Bourdieu (1977) defines as a system of durable, transposable values and beliefs that shape an individual's views and interpretations.

High school effects on college enrollment. There is some disagreement among scholars in regards to how much high schools actually matter. For example, in a study of high school learning opportunities, Gamoran (1987) found strong associations between individual student

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course-taking and achievement, but when he compared the relationship between high school characteristics (e.g., SES of study body, course offerings) and student achievement *between* schools he found only modest effects. Nonetheless, most scholars (Gamoran included) agree that high school characteristics such as organizational and instructional strategies do indeed have an effect on college-going patterns (Engberg & Wolniak, 2009; Gamoran & Long, 2006; Hill, 2008; McDonough, 1997).

Recently, the Center for Education Policy Research (CEPR) at Harvard University approached the question of high school effects by analyzing data from seven school districts across the country and the National Student Clearinghouse. The authors found that "a high school can have a considerable impact on the college enrollment patterns of its students" (Strategic Data Project, 2012, p. 1). This finding may not surprise readers. For example, scholars have long known that college enrollment rates differ considerably between schools. One reason for this stratification is that some schools (for example schools in wealthy suburbs) serve students who are better prepared for the rigors of high school. We would expect schools that serve better prepared students to have higher college enrollment rates than schools that serve students who have been denied a high quality education. The report confirms that in the districts they studied—Albuquerque Public Schools (NM), Boston Public Schools (MA), Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (NC), Fort Worth Independent School District (TX), Fulton County Schools (GA), Gwinnett County Public Schools (GA), and the School District of Philadelphia (PA)—high schools that served students who arrived in 9th grade with higher achievement levels had the highest college enrollment rates. And yet, the authors also found that when they compared high schools within districts that served students with similar levels of prior achievement there were nonetheless dramatic differences between schools. Some schools had

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college enrollment rates far higher than what would be predicted based on their incoming ninth graders, while other schools had college enrollment rates far lower than would be expected.   In Boston, MA the variance in college enrollment across schools was stark. Among schools that served the top quartile of eighth-grade achievers, college enrollment rates ranged "by about 50 percentage points" (Strategic Data Project, 2012, p. 3). The authors conclude their study by encouraging the school districts to try to understand better why such variation exists between high schools. One possible answer to this question is proposed by Hill (2008).

In reviewing the literature on high school effects on college enrollment, Hill (2008) writes that most sociological studies identify two mechanisms whereby high schools affect college enrollment: a school's formal structure and a schools' organizational norms. A school's formal structure refers to factors such as the existence or absence of a college counselor and academic course offerings. Organizational norms can refer to factors such as whether or not teachers expect most students go to college and the percentage of students who apply to three or more schools (Roderick, Nagaoka, Coca, & Moeller, 2008). Hill, however, operationalizes school norms by looking at a single variable: whether or not the school contacts parents about college selection frequently. This is no doubt a limitation of the study, but one must keep in mind that Hill was limited by the data available in the High School Effectiveness Study (HSES), a study conducted in conjunction with the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS: 88-94).

In an effort to determine which strategies were most effective in "linking" high school students with postsecondary institutions, Hill (2008) conducted a latent class analysis, a statistical method used to identify groups or categories in multivariate categorical data. Her analysis revealed three categories that she labeled *traditional*, *clearinghouse* and *brokering* (2008, p. 59). That is, among the 188 schools included in her study, Hill (2008) found that some

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high schools did very little to support students' college application process (traditional); some provided substantial resources, but played a minimal role in engaging parents in the college enrollment process (clearinghouse); while a third cluster of schools provided their students with substantial support with college applications *and* provided this information to students' parents (brokering). Hill (2008) identified a number of commonalities among the three groups. For example, Black and Latina/o students were overrepresented in "traditional" schools, while students with wealthy parents were most likely to attend "brokering" schools (p. 61). And as one might predict, each category had an effect on the likelihood of a student going on to a four-year college. In a model comparing going to a four-year college verses not going to college at all, Hill (2008) found that in comparison to traditional schools, clearinghouse schools had a positive effect on enrollment and brokering schools had a significant positive effect on enrollment. By contrast, brokering and clearinghouse schools had a negative effect on the likelihood of attending a two-year school, a finding that suggests school staff may have steered students away from two-year schools and toward four-year schools.

In a related study, Engberg and Wolniak (2010) used data from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS: 2002) to examine the ways in which student-level and school-level characteristics influenced students' likelihood of attending a two- or four-year college. In an effort to examine how student-level characteristics (e.g., students' race and SES, academic preparation, and parents' social capital), and school-level variables (e.g., racial make-up of the school, the region and learning environment) influence college enrollment, the authors conducted a hierarchical general linear model (HGLM), a model used to analyze the relationship between variables at different levels. Several of the authors' findings resonated with previous educational findings. Like the Strategic Data Project (2012), Engberg & Wolniak (2010) found that average

levels of academic preparation positively influenced college-going. If academic preparation was an important factor, so too was family background. The authors also found that students who attended schools with high average levels of socioeconomic status were more likely to attend college, particularly four-year schools. In addition, like Bloom (2006) and Weis & Cipollone (2013), the authors found that peers and parents also had a positive influence on college-going. One of their findings, however, was unexpected in light of what we know about the importance of school environment or "climate" (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli & Pickeral, 2009). "Surprisingly," write Engberg & Wolniak (2010), "we found no effects for either 2- or 4-year college enrollment related to the learning environment. We anticipated significant effects for several of these constructs, especially those related to school morale, guidance counselors, and the frequency in which students were exposed to school violence" (p. 146).

The authors surmise that the inclusion of other variables in their model may have muted the effects of school environment—and that more research on the intersection of school environment and college enrollment is needed. Finally, the authors found that school-level variables had an effect beyond their "equivalent student-level measures" (2008, p. 149). Such a finding adds credence to the notion that a school is more than the sum its parts, that it has its own culture or "organizational habitus" (McDonough, 1997).

Quantitative studies like those mentioned above demonstrate that high schools do in fact have important effects on students. They also help to clarify what those effects are by examining the ways in which schools engage or fail to engage families, support or fail to support students in the financial aid process and nudge students toward two-year colleges, or four-year colleges, or no college at all. They cannot, however, detail the ways in which educational policies and social inequalities impact the day-to-day lives of students. To get at this information we need

qualitative or mixed methods studies. Although the field of college access and college choice

has long been dominated by quantitative methodologies, a number of qualitative researchers

have contributed to this field in recent years (Perna, 2006).

From 2002-2004 Bloom (2006) conducted ethnographic studies at three high schools in

New York City. The students at two of the schools—Vista and Connections— were

predominantly low-income students of color. The students at the third school—Tower—were

racially and socioeconomically heterogeneous, with an unusually large (by New York public

school standards) population of middle class and upper class students. Although all three schools

were New York City public schools and received the same level of per-pupil expenditure from

the city, students at Tower had opportunities and resources available to them that the students at

Vista and Connections did not. Bloom's (2006) analysis of the schools demonstrates how

individual schools within the same district can shape the postsecondary paths for their students.

Most high schools in the country do not have dedicated college counselors (Clinedinest, Hurley,

& Hawkins 2012). Tower, by contrast, not only had a college counselor, it had an experienced

college counselor who was deeply immersed in the subculture of college admissions. Before

working at Tower, the counselor had worked as an admissions officer at two New York private

schools. As she explained to Bloom (2006), "It's really important to know the other side of this

process....I have a lot of friends in admissions and contacts in guidance—I can talk the 'talk' of

admissions" (p. 111). The counselor was able to deploy her social capital to benefit the students

in her school. What's more, because most students at Tower were receiving significant help with

their college application process from their parents, she was able to spend time actually advising

them, rather than walking them through the application process. Her job was not to introduce

students to the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid), as it is in some low-income

schools. Rather she could talk to the students about the differences between Vassar and Wheaton, Temple and Fordham, Stanford and NYU. Students at Vista had a far different experience. Bloom (2006) explains:

> I discovered during the fall that Lila, the college counselor at Vista, was a paraprofessional who herself had not completed a B.A. As we were talking about the CUNY [City University of New York] assessment test she confided to me that, though she had taken classes at local community colleges, she hadn't yet gotten up her nerve to take the test. Her lack of familiarity with the ins and outs of private colleges, and the competitiveness of various ones, became clear as the fall progressed. (p. 113)

Although students at Vista benefited from a distributive advisement model that gave them access to other teachers, students at Vista were nonetheless at a disadvantage. Their counselor was poorly trained, their parents were unable to help them, and their advisors were overwhelmed by the need to walk each of their 19 or 20 advisees through every step of an application while also involving their families. It was an untenable situation that was exhausting and frustrating for parents and students alike (Bloom, 2006, p. 115). Is there another way? Is there a model whereby high poverty schools can support the college-going aspirations of their students? In Chicago they have begun to develop such a program.

In 2004-2005 the Chicago Public Schools began a college coaching program in 12 high schools (Stephan, 2010, 2013). Spaces were provided in high schools for the coach to meet with students individually or in groups, support them during the college application process, and encourage them to engage in particular activities (e.g., filling out the FAFSA). In 2005 and again in 2007, the rate of college enrollment increased in schools with college coaches (when compared with the 2004 district-wide college-going rate). College enrollment increased district-

wide during this same time period, but the coached schools experienced greater gains in college

enrollment (Stephan, 2010, p. 81). According to Stephan (2011) a "difference in difference"

analysis suggests that the coaches improved the likelihood of students (particularly less

competitive students) attending college in general and four-year colleges in particular. Why was

the initiative successful? Stephan (2013) writes that the coaches were successful in large part

because of their approach. In contrast to traditional college counseling models in which

counselors allow students to take the initiative, the Chicago coaches reached out to students. For

example they would enter the cafeteria during lunchtime and try to engage the students and build

trusting relationships. In addition, by meeting with students in groups, coaches helped build

social networks among the students. Students formed relationships among themselves and

supported one another during the many steps of the college application, choice and enrollment

process.

Factors that limit college choice. Although the college choice model implicitly argues

that all students can choose *something*, in reality, historically disadvantaged students continue to

face barriers that dramatically limit their choices. These barriers can be organized into five

broad categories: college costs; academic preparation; cultural capital; social capital; and

admissions policies.

College costs.[2] For students of low-income background the financial barriers to college

entry may be the most severe (McDonough, 2004). Attending college today is more expensive

than it has ever been. Beginning in 1980 the cost of tuition in America began to rise

precipitously, a trend that has continued to the present. For example, according to a recent study

by the College Board (2013b) the published tuition and fees for four-year public institutions

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[2] There is expansive literature on college costs. While I briefly review this literature here, a more thorough review is presented in chapter 7.

(after adjusting for inflation) more than tripled between 1983-1984 and 2013-2014, while the cost of tuition and fees at community colleges and private four-year colleges during that same period more than doubled (p. 14). Although financial aid is frequently available to students who could not otherwise afford college, such students and their parents are too frequently unaware that such programs exist (Perna & Steele, 2011; Tierney & Venegas, 2009). Moreover, in recent decades changes in college financing have led to families having to bear an ever greater share of college costs. During the late 1960s, for example, state governments subsidized more than 80% of the cost of attending public in-state institutions (St. John, 2003). Since that time, state aid has decreased considerably (Mortenson, 2014).

Although the Pell Grant program—the government's largest grant program for low-income students—has expanded considerably in recent years, such increases in federal aid have not been sufficient to keep up with the concomitant rise in the cost of college or compensate for the declining average incomes that eligible families have experienced between 2002 and 2011 (College Board, 2013a, 2013b). While college enrollment has increased considerably since the 1960s, there is broad consensus that the rising cost of college has become a burden that neither low-income families, nor the nation at large can afford.

Academic preparation. Disparities in academic preparation constitute an addition barrier to students during their college choice process. According to some research, academic preparation predicts college enrollment more than any other factor (Perna, 2006, Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). Those students who attend top quality schools with top quality teachers and enroll in advanced courses like calculus are more likely to attain the academic competencies necessary to make the transition from high school to college. And yet, historical trends such as persistent racial and class-based segregation along with the placement of underqualified educators in high-

poverty schools have prevented all students from accessing rigorous and top quality curricula (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Wheeler, 2006; Reardon, 2011; Wacquant, 2008; Wilson, 1987). It is no surprise, therefore, that students who attend high poverty schools—who are disproportionately students of color and low-income students—are the students who are least academically prepared for college.

Cultural capital. The concept of cultural capital is often traced back to the pioneering work of Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Claude Passeron (1977). Subsequently, Bourdieu (1986/2007) defined cultural capital as sets of knowledge, skills and other attributes that are individually possessed, differentiated by social class and often inherited from one's family. A key concept for Bourdieu and Passeron is that cultural capital (like social capital) is converted by the middle and upper class into economic capital; it is one of the ways that social class is reproduced. Since the early work on cultural capital, the construct has been widely discussed, both generally (see, for example, De Graf and De Graf, 2002; Lamont and Lareua, 1988; and Robbins, 2005) and in the context of higher education (see, for example, Carrión, 2014; McDonough, 1994; Perna, 2006; and Tierney & Jun, 2001). Some scholars have critiqued Bourdieu, however, arguing that his notion of cultural capital insinuates that communities of color lack cultural wealth. As a result, the concept has been modified and expanded (e.g., Franklin, 2002; Lamont & Lareau, 1988; and Yosso, 2005). Yosso (2005), for example, has identified frequently overlooked forms of cultural capital that communities of color embody (e.g., aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, etc.) and shown how these embodied resources have been used to combat racism and social marginalization.

In the context of college choice, cultural capital can refer to knowledge regarding: the differences between public and private colleges, which colleges are most prestigious, and which

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colleges are most hospitable for nontraditional students. Students who are raised in low-income families and attend segregated urban schools with overworked and poorly trained counselors are far less likely to have access to this prized knowledge (McDonough, 2004). By contrast, "parents with high cultural capital attempt to secure for their children as prestigious a college education as possible because they know it will pay off in later job success and social status" (McDonough, 1994, p. 430). Low-income parents have high educational aspirations for their children and also play an important role in the college-going process (Knight et al., 2004; Tierney and Auerbach, 2005). However, they often lack the cultural knowledge that will help their children access institutions of higher education.

Social capital. Access to "social capital" (Coleman, 1988) also mediates access to college. Inequities in social capital contribute to inequities in college choice. Coleman (1988) defines social capital functionally, emphasizing that "social capital inheres in the structure of relations between actors and among actors . . . [and] facilitate[s] certain actions of actors" (p. S98). Social capital, for Coleman, refers to an individual's access to social networks and informational channels. Information about college applications, financial aid, scholarships and academic support programs reside within individuals. If one has access to such individuals one has a greater chance of gaining information that can lead to college enrollment. In high schools the individual most knowledgeable about the college preparation and application process is usually the school counselor (McDonough, 2004). Counselors are not only sources of information, they are also conduits to other individuals (admissions counselors, essay coaches, etc.) who can support college-bound students. At schools that serve large numbers of working class students and students of color, however, the ratio of counselor to student can be 1-to-1,056

or even higher (McDonough, 2004).[3] Students therefore rarely have an opportunity to meet

regularly with counselors and receive the support they need while participating in the college

choice process.

Admissions policies. College admissions policies play an important role in whether and

where students attend college. Over the past fifty years college admissions practices and policies

have changed dramatically. For example, in 1970 the City University of New York (CUNY)

instituted a program of open access whereby all New York City high school graduates were

guaranteed admission to one of its 17 colleges.[4] This policy shift provided access to thousands

of New Yorkers—many of them low-income students of color—who had been denied entry

previously. In the years to follow, thousands of historically underrepresented students enrolled

in CUNY colleges, and by the early 1980s most public universities across the country had

adopted comparable policies (Attewell & Lavin, 2007). As a result, increasing numbers of low-

income students and students of color were provided the opportunity to pursue higher education.

In recent decades, however, policies designed to increase educational opportunity such as open

admissions have come under attack. In 1999 the New York State Board of Regents approved a

plan to end remediation at CUNY senior colleges, thus ending open admissions. Today, low-

income students, African American students, and Latina/os are more likely to find themselves at

one of CUNY's community colleges, each of which have notoriously low graduation rates.

A second educational policy that plays an important role in the college choice process of

underrepresented students is affirmative action. Affirmative action refers to a set of policies that

are meant to improve the educational or occupational opportunities of historically discriminated

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[3] The centrality of counselors to the college choice process is further developed in chapter 5.
[4] In 2012 The City University of New York opened an additional community college. Today CUNY is the country's largest urban public university. It operates 11 senior colleges, seven community colleges and five graduate and professional schools (CUNY, 2014a).

against groups. In US postsecondary institutions, affirmative action has provided access and opportunity for many thousand students of color and other disadvantaged groups. In New York State, educational programs like EOP (Higher Education Opportunity Program) and SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge) continue to provide access to students from low-income families, many of whom are students of color. Nonetheless, the days of affirmative action may be limited. In the 1990s several US states banned the use of affirmative action in pubic universities. In 2014 these bans were challenged in the Supreme Court, but the Justices voted 6-2 to uphold a Michigan amendment that bans affirmative action. Today, eight US states have banned affirmative action (Desilver, 2014). According to Kahlenberg (2012), it is only a matter of time before race-based affirmative action is banned outright across the country.

While Affirmative Action receives substantial coverage in the popular press, a number of other admissions policies have had notable effects on college choice. For example, under "early admission" programs, students can apply to a single college in the fall of their senior year. If accepted, students must give their decision to the college before hearing back from other colleges. Such programs limit students' choice process by forcing them to decide on a college early. However, because applying early can increase the chances of admission, some students are willing to take the gamble. McDonough (2004) notes, however, that all students do not participate in these programs at equal rates. Low-income students who are reliant on financial aid are less likely to participate in early admission practices. They simply cannot commit to attending a college without first reviewing their financial aid package. Such programs, therefore, disproportionately benefit white students and students from upper income households. Legacy programs are another admission policy that benefits some students at the expense of others. Under such programs private universities give preference to applicants with family members

who have attended the university. Of course, such programs are unlikely to help low-income students, most of whom are raised by family members without college degrees.

Finally, admissions policies inform the college search and choice practices of undocumented students or students with undocumented parents. Such students are harmed by the financial aid component of the admissions process. Students applying for financial aid must provide their own social security number and the social security number of their parents. Students who are undocumented or whose parents are undocumented cannot provide this information. Although all legal residents, regardless of their parents' immigration status, can apply for financial aid, many are reluctant to do so because they have to provide their parents information. In addition, students who are themselves undocumented are ineligible for federal and state aid. Because undocumented youth are more likely to be from low-income families, policies that prevent such students from accessing financial aid effectively blocks many of them from pursuing higher education (Cortes, 2013). These policies likely contribute to the low—25 percent according to Nienhusser (2015)—college enrollment rate of undocumented youth. (By comparison, more than 60% of US-born high school graduates enroll in college.) Although a number of states, such as New York, Utah, California and Texas have implemented policies that benefit undocumented youth such as the provision of in-state tuition rates, three states— Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina—have passed laws banning undocumented students from attending public postsecondary institutions (Nienhusser, 2015).

Previous research suggests that academic preparation and achievement (Adelman, 1999, 2006; Perna & Kurban, 2013) and college costs (Heller, 2002; McDonough, 2004; Perna & Kurban, 2013) may be the most important factors in a student's college choice process. However, these two factors are inextricably tied to the other three (and less easily quantified)

factors I have reviewed above: cultural capital, social capital, and admissions policies. For example, students with access to networks of knowledgeable individuals (i.e., social capital) are likely to have higher levels of academic achievement and therefore enjoy broader postsecondary options. Researchers have the luxury of identifying and disentangling the factors that they believe are most salient. For students, it is all one long, complicated, and often mystifying process.

Literacy and Literacies

Few readers will dispute the notion that literacy plays an important role in whether and where a student goes to college. But what is it we mean when we talk about literacy? Literacy may at first appear to be a rather cut and dried topic. As I show here, however, this is far from the case. The concept of literacy is as politically fraught as the arena of college access and choice.

Although rigorous engagement with the subject of literacy can be traced at least as far back as Plato and was established as a legitimate academic field in the 1960s (Brockmeier & Olson, 2009), this dissertation is firmly grounded in a "sociocultural approach" to literacy that emerged in the 1980s (see, for example, Heath, 1983; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Street, 1984). By sociocultural, I mean an approach to literacy that emphasizes the social and cultural context of literacy, rather than the cognitive or psycholinguistic (Perry, 2012). Since the 1980s sociocultural literacy scholarship has progressed in a number of directions. Of greatest relevance to this dissertation are studies of *multiliteracies* (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Lankshear & Knobel, 2011; New London Group, 1996), *academic literacies* (Lea and Street, 1998, 2006; Street, 2009), and *literacy sponsorship* (Brandt, 1998, 2001; Fehler, 1010; Kibler, 2014). Each of these

three subfields will be examined. Before doing so, however, I will introduce some key terms and provide a brief overview of the field of literacy studies.

Literacy, literacies, text. Perhaps the most common definition of literacy is *the ability to read and write*. However, because this definition is vague (it does not specify what is read or how) and misleading (it suggests that literacy is singular rather than multiple), it will not be used here. Instead, I will use the word *literacy* to refer to a set of social practices mediated by written texts (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 7). Such a definition identifies literacy not in reference to competence but in reference to "practice" (Bourdieu, 1977). The emphasis is not on whether or not an individual is literate but on what he or she does with texts and how these social practices influence and are influenced by the surrounding world.

As the above definition suggests, literacy is not one thing. It is a group or set of practices that vary in important ways by time and place. The literacy practices that Dr. Johnson practiced in eighteenth century England, for example, are far different from the literacies practiced by graduate-level engineering students, which in turn are different from the literacies practiced by urban graffiti writers. For this reason a number of scholars have begun speaking of literacy in the plural. While the singular term "literacy" continues to exist as an idea, today's educators are more likely to speak of *literacies* (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011) or *multiliteracies*[5] (New London Group, 1996; Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). In this dissertation, I will do the same. The term *literacies* takes into account the fact that written text is shared in multiple modes, through multiple genres and in multiple contexts. The definition of literacies that best captures my understanding of the term was offered by Lankshear and Knobel (2011) who write that literacies are best understood as "socially recognized ways in which people generate, communicate, and negotiate meanings, as members of Discourses, through the medium of encoded texts" (p. 33).

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[5] In this dissertation the words multiliteracies and literacies are used interchangeably.

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Text is another term that will be used repeatedly in this study. Baker and Ellece (2011) write that definitions "of the term *text* are difficult as different researchers have conceptualized texts in a range of ways" (p. 150, emphasis in original). For example, in an educational setting a text frequently refers to a bound volume, while outside the classroom, the term is used to refer to brief written messages that users send to one another by computer, cell phone or tablet. In this dissertation, *text* is used to refer to "any stretch of language that functions as a unity" (Baker & Ellece, 2011, p. 150). This definition will include items such as college admission essays, text messages sent between friends, college brochures, posters, and so on.

Early studies of literacy. The word *literacy* first appeared in English language publications in the final decades of the nineteenth century, many thousand years after the emergence of literacy itself.[6] Not long after this new word entered the English lexicon, anthropologists like Lucien Lévy-Bruhl began fanning the globe, studying so-called "oral" and "primitive" societies and contrasting them with their own "literate" and "civilized" societies. Lévy-Bruhl argued that the inability to read and write prevented "illiterate" people from thinking in the same ways that literate people do (Brockmeier & Olson, 2009). This notion was popular among social scientists and non-specialists alike, in part because it offered a scientific gloss to the ethnocentric belief that Westerners were superior to so-called "primitives." In the years following Levy-Bruhl's early work, the role of literacy in explaining cultural difference was both challenged (Lévi-Strauss,1981; Scribner & Cole, 1981) and extended (Havelock, 1991). Some scholars were so taken by the incredible power of the written word that they hypothesized that literacy was that *sine qua non* that separated the "civilized" West from nonwestern cultures (see, for example, Goody and Watt, 1963; Havelock, 1991; Logan, 1986; and Olson, 1977). For

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[6] The Sumerians of Mesopotamia invented the world's first writing system between 3600 and 2900 B.C.E. (Diamond, 1999; Olson, 1994; Tracey & Morrow, 2012). It was this technology that gave rise to literacy.

example, Logan (1986) claimed that, "A person who is literate has a different world view than one who receives information exclusively through oral communication. The alphabet, independent of the spoken languages it transcribes or the information it makes available, has its own intrinsic impacts" (pp. 24-25). Today, some fifty years since Jack Goody and Ian Watt launched what has been called the "literacy thesis," literacy scholars have largely abandoned the simplistic notion that literacy *causes* logical thinking, cultural progress or scientific advancement. Even David Olson (2006), who has devoted much of his career to explaining the "special affordances" of writing, has abandoned the notion that literacy is an autonomous skill that necessarily leads to individual cognitive gains or broad social progress.

Literacy in the public imagination. While there is no single way in which the "public" (to the extent that such a construction can be said to exist) views literacy, there are nonetheless widely shared beliefs on the subject. Among them are four core beliefs about literacy that sociocultural literacy scholars have challenged. First, literacy is thought to reside in the individual (Gee, 2008). While books and laptops and smartphones exist out here in the world, literacy is believed to exist in the mind. If we would like to learn something about literacy, we are best off giving an individual a test and seeing what she knows or what she doesn't. Or better still, we can use fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging) to see what parts of the brain are activated when subjects are reading or writing.

Second, in the public discourse it is usually taken for granted that literacy is measurable. In schools across the nation students are tested and placed into reading groups based on their purported literacy level. Teachers conduct assessments and by virtue of performing a given task or answering a number of questions students are said to have a given literacy, or reading level (Roberts, 1995). Literacy measurement (that is, literacy assessment or testing) was a central

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focus of the Bush Administration's bipartisan No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (McGinn, 2006), and has continued under the Obama administration (Seely Flint, et al., 2011). While growing numbers of organizations and commentators have critiqued today's literacy assessment practices as invalid, unreliable, inappropriate or culturally biased, such critiques are typically directed at particular tests, not at the idea that literacy can in fact be identified, isolated and measured. To take just one example, the literacy scholar Cynthia McCallister (2011) describes reading as a "fundamentally social experience" that "has everything to do with the reader's subjective experiences" (xiii). But even this scholar contends that standardized tests such as the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) assessment can accurately measure a student's ability to read.

Third, literacy is thought to confer advantages on individuals. In her book *Literacy in American Lives,* Brandt (2001) writes that, "expanding literacy undeniably has been an instrument for more democratic access to learning, political participation, and upward mobility" (p. 2). Those who can read and write at an advanced level are believed to have greater access to institutions of higher education and higher paying jobs. Lareau (2003) describes how the middle class parents in her study encouraged their children to read particular books because doing so would benefit them socially and academically. I suspect few Americans would be surprised by a recent Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development report that found that literacy is "positively associated with other aspects of well-being, including labour market participation, employment, earnings, health, participation in associative or volunteer activities, and an individual's sense of having influence on the political process" (OECD, 2013b, p. 223).

Finally, literacy is thought to confer advantages on groups of people. That is, studies suggest that literacy is not simply a private good but a public one as well. For example, scholars have

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identified associations between literacy and the economic productivity of nations; literacy and

the cultural development of nations; and literacy and the scientific progress of civilizations

(Logan, 1986; Olson, 1994). Literacy has also been associated with a number of social benefits

such as political participation, health outcomes and gender equality (UNESCO, 2005). Olson

(1994) takes stock in the following manner:

> It is commonly held that it was the rise of popular literacy that led to rational, democratic
>
> social institutions as well as to industrial development and economic growth and that any
>
> decline in levels of literacy poses a threat to a progressive democratic society. (p. 5)

The perceived benefits of literacy undergird the shouts of "Crisis!" when the United States

underperforms other countries on international literacy assessments. For example, it was the

United States' middling performance on a recent international assessment[7] that led the

educational analyst Kevin Carey (2014) to write in the *New York Times* that America's poor

showing portended a dire economic future for America's workers.

Literacy reassessed. But is all of this true? Does literacy reside in the individual? Is

literacy isolatable and measurable? Is literacy both a private good and a public good? As

Bloome (2006) argues, what one believes about literacy "depends upon the theories one brings to

the field" (p. 143). From a "cognitive-processing perspective" (Tracey & Morrow, 2012),

literacy is a matter of processing, storing and retrieving information that is encoded in the

neurocircuitry of the brain. Reading is primarily an act of perception, while writing is primarily

a motor act. From a sociocultural perspective, such descriptions of reading and writing are not

necessarily wrong; they just miss the point. As Gee (2006) explains,

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[7] The Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), which was conducted
by the OECD in 2011 and 2012, is an assessment of literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills. The
OECD tested 166,000 adults between the ages of 16 and 65 in 24 countries. Among adults in the United
States who were tested, 45.7% scored at least a 3 (out of 5), below the international average of 50%
(Proliteracy, 2014).

[I]t is often better to study *social practices* that include both writing and speech, as well as various values, ways of thinking, believing, acting, and interacting, and using various objects, tools, and technologies (e.g., practices in courtrooms, secondary science classrooms, graffiti-writing urban street gangs, or urban tagging groups) than it is to look only at writing or speech per se. (p. 155)

From a sociocultural or "New Literacy" (Gee, 2000; Maybin, 2000) perspective, situating literacy in the mind is a rather limited view of a complex social phenomenon. Doing so dehistoricizes and depoliticizes a cultural practice that is always and necessarily historical and ideological (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Kaestle, 1985; Street, 1984).

The notion that literacy can be accurately and objectively measured has also been cast into doubt. Before measuring literacy, we must first come to an agreement as to what we are measuring, but as Roberts (1995) shows there is no universally accepted definition of literacy. Over the years there have been a variety of metrics used. The first histories of literacy used the ability to sign one's name as a proxy (Kaestle, 1985). As recently as 1980 the US Census Bureau "based calculations of functional literacy on the percentage of the population fourteen years and older who had completed five years or more of a school" (Roberts, 1995, p. 414). More recently literacy has come to mean surpassing a given "cut score" on an examination. But few today would accept the notion that signing one's name, attending school, or passing a test encapsulates all that literacy is.

When measuring literacy one must also decide whether or not to include the production of text. While most definitions of literacy today include writing, the OECD excludes writing from its definition and therefore excludes writing from its international survey (OECDb, 2013). For the OECD, it would seem, literacy is just reading printed text. While literacy is regularly

measured, and students are regularly ranked and sorted by their literacy levels, sociocultural literacy scholars have demonstrated that such measurements and rankings are problematic. Because literacy always has a cultural dimension (Green, 1988), a literacy assessment always invites the question: whose culture is being tested?

Finally, sociocultural literacy theory has also challenged the notion that literacy benefits individuals and societies. Much of the skepticism regarding literacy can be traced back to Harvey Graff's (1979) *The Literacy Myth.* In *The Literacy Myth*, Graff (1979) charts the changing rates of literacy in a Canadian province in the nineteenth century. Drawing on Canadian Census data, Graff shows that while working class people managed to acquire literacy, this acquisition did not lead to better jobs or higher salaries. For example, the occupational status of English Protestants was high among both the "literate" and the "illiterate" and occupational status among Canadian blacks was relatively low regardless of literacy level (Graff, 1979, pp. 80-81). What mattered, Graff shows, was not whether or not you could read but where you came from and what skin color you had.

Gee (2008) interprets Graff's work thus, "Greater literacy did not correlate with increased equality and democracy, nor with better conditions for the working class, but with continuing social stratification" (p. 81). Graff's (1979) study is an important reminder that literacy has been and always will be nested in a far greater, far more complex social world. However, we must understand Graff's conclusions in the proper context. His study was limited to a particular place (Ontario, Canada), historical moment (the early years of industrial capitalism), and social geography (the city). Since the late nineteenth century there have emerged "tightening associations between literate skill and social viability" (Brandt, 1998, p. 166). But the absolutist

view that literacy can *cause* economic growth, scientific advancement, or social progress is no longer borne out by the literature (Olson, 1994, 2006).

There is little reason to doubt that, on the whole, individuals who have demonstrated higher levels of what Morrell (2008) refers to as "dominant literacy" (i.e., the skills and knowledge that powerful bureaucracies define as "literacy") will have better paying jobs, live longer and feel more comfortable participating in the political system. And certainly, literacy plays *a role* in the high school to college transition. The point here is that literacy always exists within a broader sociopolitical reality and broad social forces such as racism, sexism, and economic exploitation can undo or temper whatever advantage literacy confers.

Literacy as a social practice. This dissertation theorizes that the college choice process is a literacy practice. In doing so, I am placing college choice within a long tradition of social practice theory (see for example, Bourdieu, 1977 and Lave & Wenger, 1991). The theory of literacy practices or literacy as a social practice is most frequently associated with Brian Street, though the idea can be traced to Scribner and Cole's (1981) study of literacy practices among the Vai in western Liberia. In *The Psychology of Literacy*, Scribner and Cole (1981) defined *practice* as "a recurrent, goal-directed sequence of activities using a particular technology and particular systems of knowledge" (1981, 236). Subsequently Barton and Hamilton (1998) extended Scribner and Cole's (1981) definition, contrasting literacy practices with "literacy events" (Health, 2013). Barton and Hamilton (1998) wrote that while a "literacy event"—any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of the participants' interactions and their interpretative processes" (Heath, 1983, p. 93)—is observable, a literacy practice is not (p. 6). The concept of the literacy practice is used in different ways by different authors. In this dissertation, I draw on Barton and Hamilton (1998) who conceive of literacy practices as "the

general cultural ways of utilizing written language which people draw upon in their lives" (p. 6).

Such a definition aligns with what Street (1984, 2012) has termed the *ideological* model of

literacy: that literacy "is a social practice, not simply a technical and neutral skill; and that it is

always embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles" (2012, p. 29). Street

(2012) contrasts the ideological approach to literacy with what he terms the *autonomous model*:

> The autonomous approach is simply one approach amongst many, but it presents itself as
>
> though it is 'natural' and, indeed, many who adopt it often tend not even to indicate the
>
> grounds for their treatment of literacy." (pp. 28-29)

While designers of large-scale literacy assessments like the SAT continuously work to escape the

charge of administering culturally biased exams, Street's work reminds us that such attempts will

ultimately be futile. Because literacy is always socially situated it will always reflect subjective

and particular—as opposed to objective and general—social knowledge.

Street (1984) first developed his theory of literacy as a social practice in an ethnographic

study of literacy practices in northeast Iran. In this study, Street (1984) does not seek to measure

or evaluate the literacies of Iranians, but to document literacies and analyze how broader social

forces shaped them. Street begins by analyzing the literacy practices related to the study of the

Koran and related commentaries. This he terms "Maktab" literacy. Street stresses that when

mullahs travel from village to village teaching 'reading' what they are really teaching is reading-

as-ideology. Street contrasts the religious "Maktab" literacy with the "commercial" literacy

practiced by Iranians in Chesmeh, "the capital city of Khorosan Province in North East Iran"

(Street, 1984, p. 160). In Chesmeh, individuals signed checks, wrote out bills, labeled boxes and

created tables for organizing accounts. Whereas the Maktab literacy centered on the Koran and

was limited by an overarching religio-cultural framework, in Chesmeh, shopkeepers and fruit

venders developed their own literacy modes, granting themselves authority over the written work.

Since the publication of *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, scholars have identified and analyzed a vast array of literacy practices. For example, Barton and Hamilton's (1998) influential *Local Literacies* examines the "everyday literacies" practiced in Lancaster, England. Barton and Hamilton (1998) observed people dealing with "shopping lists, television schedules…calendars, scrap books . . . catalogues and advertisements" (p. 14). What people did with these texts and how they thought about them were shaped by social structures such as religion, employment, school, and gender. A central thesis of *Local Literacies* is that literacy is always particular. Thus, literacies practiced in Lancaster, England (Barton and Hamilton, 1998) are likely to be distinct from literacies studied by other literacy scholars like those practiced on a Western Polynesian atoll (Besnier, 1991), online (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011), in urban classrooms in the United States (Morrell, 2008), or secondary schools in Australia (Luke, 2000),

More recently, some sociocultural literacy scholars have argued that New Literacy scholars like Barton and Hamilton have overemphasized the local situatedness of literacy (Brandt and Clinton, 2002). Drawing on the sociological work of Bruno Latour, Brandt and Clinton (2002) observe that the global is not a force that exists above and apart from local contexts. Globalization is a phenomenon that draws together locales. In other words, there is no global/local schism. To acknowledge that literacy is local does not mean that it is necessarily dissimilar from literacies elsewhere. Under the ethnographic gaze everything looks particular. To participants everything seems self-made. That does not mean it is so. As Brandt and Collins (2002) observe: "[l]iterate practices are not typically invented by their practitioners" (p. 338). To

this, Baynham, and Prinsloo (2009) have added, "the local exists in a networked and global world, that literacies have to been seen as transnational or at least translocal" (p. 12).

(Multi)literacies. As the world has become more transnational and multicultural, literacy scholars have shifted the conversation from the singular literacy to multiple or multi-literacies. While the notion that literacies are multiple can be traced to a number of sources (Gallego & Hollingsworth, 1992), multileracies theory is most frequency traced back to a seminal paper by the New London Group (1996).[8] In their paper, the authors sought to develop a theory of literacy and literacy pedagogy that could account for two social changes the group had identified: the trend of English-speaking countries becoming ever more culturally and linguistically diverse, and the trend of information and communication technologies becoming increasingly "multimodal." Multimodality—a term frequently associated with Gunther Kress (2010)—refers to "communication in the widest sense, including gesture, oral performance, artistic, linguistic, digital, electronic, graphic and artifact-related" (Pahl & Rowsell, 2006). Scholars who work from a multimodality framework remind us that when we "read" we do not just decode the written word, but find meaning and create knowledge by listening, speaking, gesturing, reading and writing. It's not too much of an exaggeration to say that a dissertation may be the last place where you will encounter the written word independent of photographs, charts, graphs, cartoons and other representational forms.

The trend toward increased cultural and linguistic diversity that the New London Group (1996) discussed almost 20 years ago is more pronounced today and perhaps nowhere more so than in the nation's schools. Banks and Banks (2009) report that in 2007, 20 percent school-age youth in the United States spoke a language other than English at home and by 2030

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[8] In the 20 years since the publication of *A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies* (New London Group, 1996), most literacy scholars have dropped the *multi-* suffix and instead simply speak of *literacies*. I do the same here.

approximately 40 percent of students will be English Language Learners. García and Leiva (2013) have explored some of the ramifications of linguistic diversity in the classroom. In a study conducted in a New York City public school, García & Leiva (2013) show that when students engage in literacy practices, they do not draw on one language system when they are with friends and family and a second "academic" language when they are at school; rather, they draw on a unitary, "heteroglossic" (Bakhtin, 1981) language system. While there may be one Language of Wider Communication (Smitherman, 1995), students who have access to multiple languages and registers are likely to draw on all of them while in the classroom.

In the years since the New London Group's (1996) seminal paper there has been a proliferation of studies examining multimodal literacies and digital literacies. Of greatest relevance to this dissertation is the body of work produced by Wendy Knobel and Colin Lankshear (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007, 2011). Knobel and Lankshear are interested in "new literacies" and what makes them new. Like many other scholars, Knobel and Lankshear draw attention to what they call "new technical stuff." They explain how advances in computing and nanotechnology have resulted in new and exciting textual practices. How information is created and shared is different today than at any time in the past. As Lankshear and Knobel (2007) explain,

> Relatively unsophisticated desktop publishing software can generate text and image effects that the best printers often could not manage under typographic conditions and "publishing" now is no longer limited to print or images on paper, but can include additional media such as voice recordings, music files, 2D and 3D animation, video, paintshopped images, scanned images of paper-based artworks, etc. (p. 8).

While technological advances like these are fairly well known, Lankshear and Knobel (2007) also draw attention to something of equal importance: the ideological underpinnings of these technologies. This, Lankshear and Knobel (2007) refer to as "new ethos stuff."

> When we say that new literacies involve different "ethos stuff" from that which is typically associated with conventional literacies we mean that new literacies are more "participatory," "collaborative," and "distributed" in nature than conventional literacies. That is, they are less "published," "individuated," and "author-centric" than conventional literacies. (p. 9).

For Lankshear and Knobel (2007, 2011) it is an error to solely focus solely on the technical aspects of new literacies. For these authors, and many more, new literacies are technologies that have the capacity to shift the way people think and act. New literacies create spaces for online communities for emerge, and for writers to take more active roles in meaning making. Today's college-going landscape reflects this environment of multiliteracies. Students learn about college by visiting college's websites and going on "virtual tours." Applications to college are almost exclusively online and students are encouraged to write personalized college admission essays that draw from their full repertoire of linguistic competences.

Literacy sponsorship. In the mid-1990s the literacy scholar Deborah Brandt studied the role of literacy in the lives of 80 Americans living in the Midwest. She conducted over 100 interviews over the course of many years. Her participants—though not perfectly representative of the county in south central Wisconsin where her study was set—were nonetheless wide ranging. They were born between 1895 and 1985 and represented a wide variety of ethnicities, educational backgrounds and economic backgrounds. Over the course of her project, Brandt was struck by a disparity between how literacy is typically studied (that is, as an individual

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competence) and the way it was described to her by her participants (as something hoped for, as something imposed upon and, sometimes, as a social practice). Again and again, her participants pointed to a particular person or group of people who played central roles in their literacy development. In an effort to make sense of this phenomenon, Brandt (1998, 2001) developed the concept of literacy sponsorship.

Most of us do not learn to engage with written language on our own. Yes, there are "precocious readers" who enter preschool, kindergarten and first grade already knowing how to read without formal instruction (Olson, Evans, & Keckler, 2006). And yes, there will always be autodidacts who, like Shakespeare, don't need much in the way of formal training. But these are always the exceptions. Most of us come to literacy because of individuals who have taken a special interest in us or have been tasked with teaching us to read or write. By what label should we refer to these literacy mediators? The most common name, of course, would be teacher, though the word tutor is not uncommon and, in the twentieth-century, co-called literacy specialists are playing increasingly important roles in American primary and secondary schools. Brandt, however, opts for another term, and not only because so much literacy apprenticeship takes places outside of formal education settings. Brandt develops the notion of sponsorship to highlight the connection between literacy and the marketplace. In the same way that television and radio programming is "brought to us" by commercial sponsors with particular interests, literacy is frequently brought to the young by literacy sponsors who themselves have interests. Sometimes these interests are religious (Fehler, 2010; Kibler, 2014; Moss, 1989; Street, 1984), while in other contexts literacy is believed to play a role in cultural progress (Olson, 1994) or liberation (Douglass, 1845/1995; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Wright & Mahiri, 2010). For Brandt (1998), literacy sponsors "are any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable,

support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way" (p. 166). That is, literacy sponsors do not just selflessly teach reading and writing; literacy sponsors have their own agendas, their own belief systems, their own systems of accountability within which they work. For example, the pedagogical goals of literacy sponsors who taught in Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute were quite different from the literacy sponsors who taught in the Social Nonviolent Coordinating Committee-funded (SNCC) Mississippi Freedom Schools. While the "Hampton-Tuskegee" model emphasized self-help and accommodation (Anderson, 1988), the Mississippi Freedom Schools emphasized political mobilization and resistance to racial oppression. In neither case was the ultimate goal literacy per se. It was literacy in the service of something greater.

Since the publication of *Literacy in American Lives* a number of scholars have applied the concept of literary sponsorship in their own research (see, for example, Fehler, 2010; Kibler, 2014; Street, 2003; Wright & Mahiri, 2010). Fehler (2010), for example, discusses the role of literacy sponsorship in nineteenth and twentieth century settlement houses in Texas. Like Jane Addams' well-known Hull House, the settlement houses of Texas were organized to support the life opportunities of low-income families, most of whom had recently immigrated. Anglo settlers set up kindergartens, organized sports teams and taught reading and writing. Like the settlement workers in Chicago, the Anglo workers in Texas sought to Americanize the Mexican and Mexican-Americans with whom they worked, but they also validated Mexican culture, to some extent, by incorporating Mexican song and dance in school. In describing this history, Fehler (2010) draws extensively on Brandt's notion of literacy sponsorship. Fehler, for example, notes that the settlement workers did not serve others out of pure altruism. These women

(settlement workers were almost exclusively female) believed that helping their "Mexican neighbors would improve the economic and social life of a community generally" and—perhaps more importantly—the sponsors' acts of good will would lead others to view them "as good Christians" (p. 361).

Wright and Mahiri (2010) describe a very different type of literacy sponsorship, a participatory action research project "in which young people were supported in the development of academic literacy skills through research and community action projects (pp. 122-123). Although ten people were involved in the project (eight youth and two adults), the article focuses on a second-generation 13-year-old Latino boy, Pepe, who is a struggling reader at a beginning of the project. By the conclusion of the project Pepe has made dramatic literacy gains and the authors attribute these gains to the warm nurturing environment that the literacy sponsors helped to effect and the "assets-based and apprenticeship model [that] connected literacy activities to real-world purposes" (Wright & Mahiri, 2010, pp. 125-126). Like Fehler (2010), Wright and Mahiri draw on Brandt's notion of sponsorship, but unlike Fehler who uses sponsorship to emphasize the multiple aims of sponsors (altruistic, religious, economic and social), for Wright and Mahiri (2010) the word "sponsor" is used to suggest a collaborative pedagogical approach unlike the "overly directive" methods one is more likely to see in a school setting (p. 125). Wright and Mahiri's paper also emphasizes the fact that successful literacy sponsorship relies upon the goals and interests of students. The literacy sponsors sought out Pepe's perspective and used his interests and goals to guide their work.

Academic literacies. Another important strand of literacies research foregrounds the role of literacies and literacies learning in academic settings (Lea and Street, 1998, 2006; Street, 2009). These studies are firmly grounded in a sociocultural approach to literacy, but in certain

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respects these study are quite different from the "first generation" (Baynham and Prinsloo, 2009) of sociocultural literacy scholarship. First generation sociocultural literacy scholars spent a great deal of time cataloguing and validating literacy in "out-of-school" settings (Hull and Schultz, 2001). They very purposefully chose to document and analyze those literacies that others had ignored. They made few efforts—Heath's (1983) *Ways with Words* is an exception—to address classroom pedagogy. This opened the field up to critique. Some readers (e.g., McCabe, 1998 and Stephens, 2000) argued that a sociocultural or "New Literacy" approach to literacy was ill-suited to the classroom.

Since that time, however, sociocultural scholars have returned to the classroom to document and theorize what Lea and Street (1998, 2004) term "academic literacies." The theory of academic literacies, while relevant to elementary and secondary schools, was developed in a postsecondary setting. Drawing on research carried out in two UK universities, Lea and Street (1998) identified three models of university-based literacy pedagogy. The first, "study skills," emphasized operational knowledge of syntax, grammar, punctuation, etc. This model suggested that it was lack of operational knowledge of the English language that was keeping many students from progressing academically. The second model, "socialization," emphasized the importance of acculturating students into "the discourses and genres of particular disciplines and… making the features and requirements of these explicit to students" (p. 25). This model foregrounds the role of cultural and discourse communities and assumes that for students to succeed they must be properly apprenticed into the discourse community of the school. The third model, the model that Lea and Street (1998) advocate, is the "academic literacies model." This approach applies the central tenets of New Literacy Studies to a university setting. The academic literacies model holds that the literacies practiced in a university are socially-situated

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and involve "a variety of communicative practices, including genres, fields, and disciplines" (Lea and Street, 1998, p. 159). Academic success is dependent upon a students' awareness of (usually unstated) codes of discursive practice (Delpit, 1995). The approach also suggests that the "problems" of students writing are not situated in the students' themselves. The problems frequently are a result of a gap between what the professors want from the students and what the students think their professors want.

Academic literacies are practiced in both high schools and colleges, but these literacies are rarely the same (Conley, 2010; Harklau, 2001; Payne-Bourcy & Chandler-Olcott, 2003; White and Lowenthal, 2010). America's K-12 system has been historically separate from its postsecondary system and efforts to reform the one system are often unrelated to efforts to reform the other (Kirst & Venezia, 2004). As a result, the literacies practiced in each sphere can be quite different. Typically, the literacy demands in postsecondary school are more rigorous. This would not be a major problem if professors spent time introducing students both to new content *and* the literacies germane to postsecondary study. However, most professors who teach subjects other than English or composition give scant attention to disciplinary reading and writing. As Bean (2011) writes, most postsecondary professors resist the idea that it is their responsibility to help their students become better writers or to help them read difficult texts. Many college instructors see content delivery as their primary duty.

Harklau (2001) has conducted one of the few studies of how students experience changes in literacy from high school to college. The four young women she followed identified major differences in the ways literacy was both conceived and enacted. For example, while note taking was an "auxiliary" practice in high school, it was a central classroom practice in college (Harklau, 2001, p. 46). The prevalence and process of essay writing also differed by context.

While the young women turned in several drafts of essays to their high school teachers, this rarely occurred in college. In recent years, it has been well established that both high school and college are settings in which "academic literacies" are practiced. Less well established is the notion that the transition from high school to college is itself characterized by literacies. That the literacies involved in this transitional phase has not been studied extensively is not altogether surprising. Contemporary scholars who approach literacy from a sociocultural perspective generally do not discuss college choice and scholars who study college choice do not typically do so from a sociocultural literacy perspective.[9] In this dissertation I seek to demonstrate the value of bringing these two fields together.

Conceptual Framework

Earlier in this chapter I noted that in the early years of college choice scholarship (1960s-1980s), theories of status attainment and rational choice dominated. In the 1990s, in large part because of the scholarship of Patricia McDonough (1994, 1997), college choice scholars began drawing on Bourdieu's theories of habitus, field, and capitals. In the 2000s, Perna (2006) developed a conceptual model of college choice that incorporated both human capital theory (Becker, 1962) and sociological theories of status attainment (e.g., Sewell, Hauser, & Wolk, 1986) and capital (Bourdieu, 1986/2007). While human capital and sociological theories have led to important insights regarding the nature of college choice, neither can fully account for how language and literacy practices shape the college choice process. For this we must turn to discourse theory.

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[9] Although I am not aware of any scholars who have examined the role of discourse or literacy in the college choice process, some scholars have used Gee's (2008) theory of Discourse or Street's (1984) social practice perspective to inform theoretical (White & Lowenthal, 2010) and ethnographic (Harklau, 2001; Payne-Bourcy & Chandler-Olcott, 2003) work in college access.

D/discourse Theory

In this dissertation I examine the college choice process through an analytical framework developed by Gee (2005, 2008). One of Gee's central ideas—indeed a central concept for all discourse theorists—is that language is best understood in context. That is, the meaning of a "text"—an email, a poster, an essay, a lecture—cannot be fully understood by looking at the words alone. One must pull back the lens, as it were, to include the other "stuff" that gives meaning to language. As Smitherman (1999) notes, "It is not enough just to know the syntax of a language, to know how to pronounce its sounds, to know its many words. You need also to know the rules of speaking the language in the social and cultural contexts that are an inextricable dimension of any language" (p. 195). Of course, language (and literacy) *can* be pried away from its social context. Indeed, many a linguist has made a career doing just this. And so, to distinguish between language alone and language as it is enacted in the world, Gee uses the words discourse (with a small "d") and Discourse (with a capital "D"), respectively. Gee (2008) explains that "discourse" with a small "d" refers to "language in use or connected stretches of language that make sense, like conversations, stories, reports, arguments, essays, and so forth" (p. 154). By contrast,

> A Discourse with a capital "D" is composed of distinctive ways of speaking/listening and often, too, writing/reading coupled with distinctive ways of acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, dressing, thinking, believing, with other people and with various objects, tools, and technologies, so as to enact specific socially recognizable identities engaged in specific socially recognizable activities. (Gee, 2008, p. 155)

When we engage in language, Gee reminds us, it is typically to express ourselves in a particular way, for a particular social purpose. Students write a college essay in a particular register using

particular words because they have an idea (whether implicit or explicit) of how they want their readers to think and feel about them. Of course the Discourse of college admission—what Gee would describe as a secondary Discourse—is quite different from the Discourse practiced in one's home with one's family.

As Gee (2008) explains,

> While there are an endless array of Discourses in the world, nearly all human beings, except under extraordinary conditions, acquire an initial Discourse within whatever constitutes their primary socializing unit early in life. Early in life, we all learn a culturally distinctive way of being an "everyday person"—that is, a non-specialized, non-professional person. We can call this our "primary Discourse." (p. 156)

While primary Discourses—ways of talking, thinking and being—are developed in the home, secondary Discourses "are acquired within institutions that are part and parcel of wider communities" (Gee, 2008, p. 157). Those individuals who are raised in families whose primary Discourses overlap with the Discourses enacted in socially valued institutions have an advantage of sorts. They have less to learn when they get to school or the workplace and are less likely to suffer "cultural conflict" (Delpit, 1995). Although Gee contends that a primary Discourse is never identical to a secondary Discourse, some scholars have observed important similarities between the norms, values, beliefs and languages enacted in middle and upper class homes and the norms, values, beliefs and languages enacted in dominant social institutions (Bernstein, 1971; Hart & Risley, 1999; Heath, 1983; Lareau, 2003). On the other hand, the norms, values, beliefs and languages practiced in working class homes and the homes of students of color can be very different from those practiced in dominant social institutions (Delpit, 1995; Heath, 1983; Lareau, 2003; Smitherman, 1999; Willis, 1977; Yeh, 1998).

Gee's theory of Discourse suggests that the languages and texts that form a part of the college choice landscape are interwoven with beliefs and values. What students say, what they read and what they write will be informed by their immediate social context and the broader context of higher education. Gee's theory also suggests that the Common Application, the SAT, and other college-going texts are ideological texts informed by the broader Discourse of college choice, a Discourse very new and unfamiliar to most college aspirants. The degree to which students successfully engage in these texts will depend not simply on their ability to comprehend the texts but on their familiarity with the Discourses in which the texts are situated.

Purpose and Research Questions

This study examines the role literacies play in the college choice process of 14 adolescents who, at the time of the study, were high school seniors at a high poverty high school in the Bronx. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted at the school (and a number of follow-up interviews), the study seeks to reframe the ways in which young men and women conceive of, and participate in, college choice.

The present study adopts a novel theoretical approach to the topic of college choice. Rather than foreground status attainment or any of the other common approaches to college choice, this study foregrounds the role of literacy/literacies and D/discourse. Such an approach has led me to emphasize the role of textually mediated social practices, institutional ideology, individual knowledge of and facility with college-going texts, and whether and how students gain access to individuals that Brandt (1998) has termed literacy sponsors. Two research questions guide this project:

1. How do students from low-income families who attend a public high school in the Bronx, NY develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes associated with the college choice process?

2. How do educators at a public high school in the Bronx support low-income students through the college choice process?

Structure of the Dissertation

In the following chapter, chapter 2, I articulate my methodological approach to this project. I situate this project in the broader field of ethnography, and more specifically ethnography in education. I introduce the school where the study took place (a school that I refer to as Genevieve Brooks High School), the surrounding neighborhood and the students who very generously agreed to participate in the study. I describe my methods of data collection and my analytical approach. I then reflect upon my own role in the study. Finally I discuss limitations of the study, my efforts to minimize validity threats, and other ethical considerations.

In chapter 3 I describe what I refer to as the college-going Discourse of Genevieve Brooks High School. College-going Discourse builds on the notion of "college-going culture" (McClafferty, McDonough, & Nuñez, 2002) and extends it by drawing on Gee's (2005, 2008) theory of Discourse. In this chapter I explore four components of the Discursive environment: the visual literacy environment; the emotional environment; written discourse; and oral discourse.

Chapter 4 examines three literacy events (Heath, 1983) that I observed at GBHS. Events such as these were described to me by students as playing important roles in their college-going

process. In this chapter I pay particular attention to four discursive features of the events: the ideological frames; languages and texts; genres; and how students are positioned.

In chapter 5 I examine college counseling through a discursive lens. The 14 students who participated in this study identified two men as playing particularly important roles in their college choice processes. Chapter 5 focuses on these two men, the work they did, and how they went about doing it. In this chapter I suggest reframing the work these men did by drawing on a construct—literacy sponsorship—developed by the literacy scholar, Deborah Brandt.

Chapter 6 is a discourse analysis of a syllabus taught at Genevieve Brooks High School. In contrast to the other chapters in this dissertation that look *across* data sets, this chapter peers *into* a single text. I do not do a strictly textual analysis, however. Classroom-based observations and interviews with the authors of the syllabus and the students who experienced the syllabus help to bring my analysis into relief.

Chapter 7 addresses what I refer to as college finance literacy. In this chapter I examine when and how students first develop perceptions regarding college finance. I then describe how these early perceptions contributed to literacy around college-finance. Also included in this chapter is an analysis of three challenges many students experienced in relation to college finance.

In the final chapter, chapter 8, I present a summary of my findings and discuss implications for practice, theory and policy.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Ethnography in Education

In this dissertation I adopt an ethnographic approach to the study of a particular

educational problem, the college choice process of low-income youth. The word "ethnography"

is frequently used to refer to a broad, in-depth, extended study of a particular community or

social group (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). For example, a comprehensive ethnography might

seek to examine the culture of a particular school by documenting and analyzing the actions and

interactions of students and staff. Such a study might lead an ethnographer to spend a number of

years conducting observations and talking to students and staff both in and out of school. In

recent decades, however, researchers from a variety of fields including education have begun

using ethnographic tools such as participant observation and semi-structured interviews to

approach narrower topics. For example, in one recent ethnographic study conducted in an "infant

school" in England, Pahl (2012) homes in on one teacher's pedagogic *habitus* and her students'

multimodal text-making. This targeted approach—the approach I have adopted in this study—is

referred to as an "ethnography in education" by Green and Bloome (1997). In describing

ethnographies in education, Green and Bloome (1997) write that such studies are "grounded in

knowledge derived from the field of Education and the historical background of ethnography in

anthropology and sociology. These studies, however, are guided by educational questions,

purposes, needs and concerns" (p. 188). The present study was guided by the research questions

articulated in chapter 1 of this dissertation and a deeper question that I have contemplated

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throughout my life as an educator: *what can be done to support the lives and dreams of students who have been historically denied access to high quality education?*

Role of the Researcher

Research, like literacy, is never a neutral or unbiased endeavor. As Nietzsche (1897) has written: "But with the same necessity with which a tree will bear its fruits, our thoughts grow from out ourselves and our values . . ." (p. 3). Contemporary scholars echo Nietzsche's sentiments, but go a step further, enjoining researchers to identify and reflect upon their multiple subjectivities (e.g., Luttrell, 2010; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). This study of literacy and college choice did not emerge *ex nihilo*; it emerged from a teacher and emerging researcher who has spent considerable time in Bronx high schools working alongside young men and women of color, many of them low-income, many of them hoping to be the first in their families to attend college. This study is also the brainchild of a white researcher whose life experiences differ in important ways from the young men and women of color I have taught as a high school English teacher and later studied alongside as an ethnographer. My parents are both college graduates. I was raised in a wealthy New Jersey suburb and attended the local public schools which, unlike too many urban schools, wanted for nothing. After high school I did what nearly everybody else in my senior class did; I went to college. After t-ball came little league and after high school came college. My inherited *habitus* (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977/2000) meant that doing anything other than going away to college did not cross my mind.

My *habitus* and my biases have undoubtedly influenced my observations, interviews, and analysis. Over the course of this project I have made great efforts to listen dispassionately to the

participants and broadcast their voices, but ultimately the voice that will be most prominent in this study will be my own.

The Neighborhood

This study took place in a school located in the South Bronx, a culturally and racially diverse collection of neighborhoods in New York City. The South Bronx is not officially demarcated but according to Gonzalez (2004), it includes neighborhoods such as Mott Haven, Melrose, Morrisania, Claremont, Hunts Point, Crotona Park East and "everything south of Fordham Road, from Highbridge and the lower Concourse to Tremont, University Heights, and lower Fordham" (p. 109). In the neighborhood in which the study takes place[10] one finds low-lying buildings of gray stucco and red brick, automotive repair shops, municipal buildings and overflow trailers. There are row houses with iron bars on the windows and old factories with razor wire lining the roofs. There are abandoned factories, old factories being repurposed as storage warehouses, and large public facilities like a nearby post office built during the Great Depression under the aegis of President Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration. There are a number of fast food restaurants and, farther away, public housing. A major expressway, one of five that snake through the borough, runs a few hundred feet from the school building. Every day thousands of vehicles pass by the school, releasing tons of noxious contaminants into the air. As in many communities of color across the nation, residents of the South Bronx are exposed to disproportionately high levels of airborne contaminants associated with asthma and developmental delays in childhood (Maantay, 2007).

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[10] In an effort to protect the anonymity of participants and their school I will not report which neighborhood the school was located in.

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Ninety-seven percent of residents in the neighborhood where the study took place are either African American/Black (26%) or Hispanic (71%).[11] The remaining three percent identified as white (1.3%), Asian and Pacific Islander (.5), American Indian/Alaska Native (0.3%), another race (0.2%, or two or more races (0.6%). While the vast majority of Latina/os in the area are Dominican or Puerto Rican, recent immigration patterns have led to an increase in residents from Mexico, Central America and South America. The most frequently spoken language (other than English) is Spanish followed by three West African languages: Kru, Ibo and Yoruba (Kiersz, 2014). Sixty-five percent of residents receive cash assistance through the federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program, Supplemental Security Income or Medicaid. Fifty percent of family households are headed by a single male or female (NYC Dept. of City Planning, 2013). According to recent Census data, the congressional district in which Genevieve Brooks High School is located is the poorest in the nation (Sisk, 2010). Thirty-eight percent of all residents and 50% of children in this district live below the poverty line. The median annual income for families with at least one child under 18 is just over $22,000, approximately $1,000 less than the 2012 federal poverty threshold for a family of four including two children under 18 (Sisk, 2010; US Census Bureau, 2012). [12]

In light of these statistics it is surprising to read recent histories of the South Bronx that describe the borough's upward trajectory. And yet scholars such as Gonzalez (2004), Jonnes (2002) and de Kadt (2011) all describe the South Bronx as a community on the rise. The epidemics that ravaged the South Bronx—heroin, crack, AIDS, arson—appear to be in the past. Urban renewal, the post-World War II federal initative that ravaged urban areas like the South Bronx, has been abandoned. Crime is down and the population has stabilized. Today,

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[11] In this paper, the phrase Latino/a is used (rather than Hispanic) except when drawing on published data.
[12] Here and throughout the dissertation, I have rounded some numbers in an effort to maintain the anonymity of the school and the participants involved in the study.

organizations like the Bronx River Arts Center, the Bronx Museum of the Arts and The Point

provide cultural programming for the community at large and the youth, in particular.

Community-based social justice organizations like Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice,

Mothers on the Move, and Sustainable South Bronx abound; and community members have

come together to reclaim once-despoiled natural resources like the Bronx River. When Jill

Jonnes updated her book on the South Bronx in 2002 she retitled it, *South Bronx Rising: The*

Rise, Fall, and Resurrection of an American City. And Evelyn Gonzalez, in her history of the

Bronx, concludes her book by writing, "A new Bronx is rising from the ashes of the old" (2004,

p. 181). All of this is hard to square with recent data related to school segregation, childhood

poverty, and malnourishment (Annie E. Casey, 2014; Kucsera & Orfield, 2014). And yet, for

families whose children attend schools that have committed themselves to supporting the

postsecondary aspirations of their students, there is cause for cautious optimism.

Genevieve Brooks High School[13]

Most data for this study were collected at Genevieve Brooks High School during the

2012-2013 school year. Genevieve Brooks High School, a public high school located in the

South Bronx, is one of over 400 public high schools in New York City. The school is located in

a plain, three-story red-brick building that it shares with another public school. It sits on a side

street, tucked between a boulevard once known as the Champs-Élysées of the Bronx and a

highway that Robert Moses foisted on Bronxites some fifty years ago. At the time of the study,

Genevieve Brooks served approximately 560 students, 85% of whom were eligible to receive

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[13] Genevieve Brooks was a community activist who lived and agitated in the South Bronx in the 1970s,
when the area was considered an international symbol of "urban failure" (Jonnes, 2002, p. 3). Brooks,
along with other activists, drew citywide attention to the many challenges facing Bronxites and
challenged city lawmakers to act. I have named the school in which this study took place in her honor.

free or reduced lunch through the National School Lunch Program. The student population was

61% Hispanic (Latino/a), 37% Black (African American), 3% Asian,and 1% white. One third of

the student body was male; two-thirds were female (NYC DOE, 2014c).

Genevieve Brooks was founded in 1994, five years after the New York City Board of

Education began an initiative to phase out large high schools and replace them with smaller,

more personalized learning communities (Darling-Hammond, Ancess, & Ort, 2002). During the

1990s most high schools in New York City were still large "comprehensive" or "factory model"

schools that served many thousand students. With low graduation rates and high drop-out rates

such schools garnered bad reputations (Bearman, 2006; Darling-Hammond, Ancess, & Ort,

2002). Although the phase-out of comprehensive high schools was near complete during the

year in which I conducted my fieldwork, in 1994 Genevieve Brooks was among the first "small

schools" in New York City. According to the school principal Yelena Holub,[14] Genevieve

Brooks "was created as another option to the parents. We were a boutique school. We had kids

travel from Staten Island, we had kids travel from Queens." During these early years of

Genevieve Brooks High School, the student body was racially and socioeconomically diverse.

Over the years, however, things changed. One by one, the comprehensive high schools were

closed and replaced by smaller high schools, many of which were charters. Students who had

been traveling an hour or more to get to GBHS now had other options. As Kemple (2013)

notes, between 1999 and 2013, 251 high schools were opened in New York City. As the years

moved on fewer and fewer middle class families sent their students to Genevieve Brooks. Then

the Great Recession of 2007-2009 hit and the school's poverty rate—which had been gradually

rising—shot into the 80s.

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[14] Yelena Holub is a pseudonym, as are all names of individuals and most organizations in this dissertation.

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Despite the inherent challenges of educating students from low-income backgrounds, Genevieve Brooks High School has made a concerted effort to support the educational aspirations of their students. Indeed, Genevieve Brooks was selected as a research site because of its commitment to preparing low-income students for college. One way the school supports its students is by forming partnerships with local college access programs and organizations. In the years preceding this study, Genevieve Brooks had partnered with AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination), a national college readiness program. Although this partnership had ended by the time my study began (the program ceased before Ms. Holub was named principal but she believed it was ended because of budgetary constraints), Genevieve Brooks was actively working with a number of other programs including College Entry (a program that places trained college counselors in urban high schools), College Today (a dual enrollment program that provides college classes to 11th and 12th grade high school students in a local public college), Upstart (a similar program that places high schools students in a local proprietary college), and Summer Transition[15] (a program that supports recently graduated high schools seniors during the summer between their final year of high school and their first year of college).

During the 2013 graduation ceremony Principal Yolub stood in front of a packed audience of families, friends and teachers and announced that over 90% of the school's graduates had been accepted to college. This number, while accurate, may have misled the audience. Although most students at Genevieve Brooks High School apply to and are accepted to college every year, far fewer make a successful transition to college. According to data reported by the New York City Department of Education, 54% of students in the 2013 cohort (students who entered high school four years earlier) were enrolled in a 2- or 4-year college in December of

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[15] During the 2012-2013 school year I consulted for one of the organizations that provided training for Summer Transition college coaches.

2013 (Figure 2.1). This number (54%) placed Genevieve Brooks in the 79th percentile (in

comparison to New York City schools that enroll similar types of students) and in the 50th

percentile compared to all New York City high schools. The staff at Genevieve Brooks is

committed to helping their students transition from high school to college, but as Harold

Franklin, the college counselor explained to me, "Every year you're here, it's hard."

Postsecondary Enrollment Rates

	GBHS	Comparable NYC Schools	All NYC Schools
Value	54	41.8	54.2
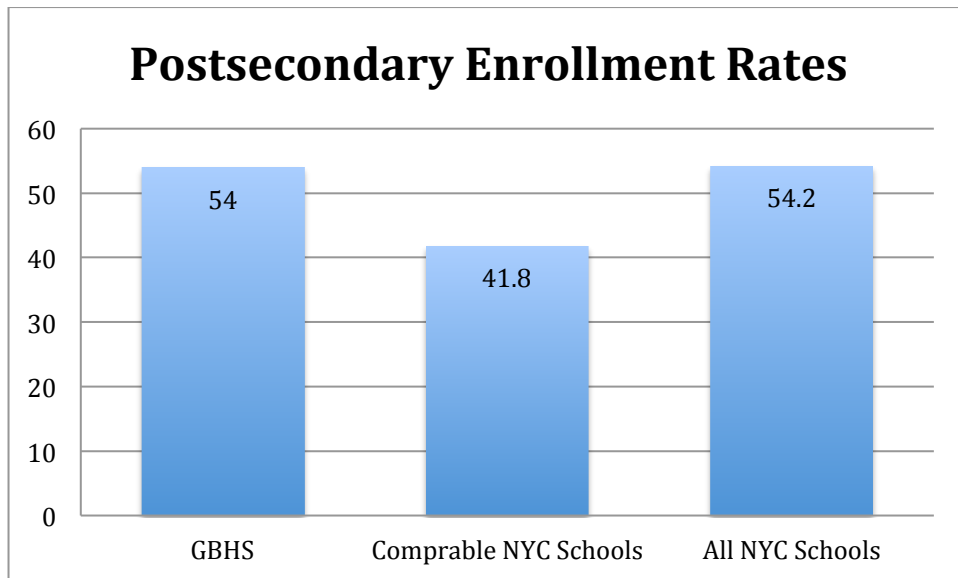
Figure 2.1 Postsecondary Enrollment Rates

Source: New York City Department of Education (NYC, 2014e)
Note: These percentages refer to students in the 2013 cohort (students who began high school
four years earlier) and who enrolled in public service, a vocational program, or a degree program
at a two- or four-year college six months after completing high school. "Comparable New York
City schools" or what the DOE call "peer schools" refers to schools that enroll students who are
similar in terms of demographic background and academic proficiency at the time they begin
ninth grade.

Participants

Twenty members of the Genevieve Brooks High School community participated in this study. Because the study centered on the college choice process of students I began by recruiting the students first. Only after recruiting the students (the primary participants) did I ask staff members (the secondary participants) to participate in the study. Participants were chosen using a "purposeful sampling" procedure (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). According to Luttrell (2010), among the "purposes" of purposeful sampling is to ensure "variety among the selected participants" (p. 6). In this study I ensured a variety of students by sampling male and female students, native New Yorkers and immigrants, students from a variety of ethnic groups, and students who had demonstrated various levels of academic achievement. However, because I was interested in the experiences of low-income students, I did seek out students who were eligible for free or reduced lunch. The adults were chosen by a different criterion. I wanted to interview school-based personnel who played important roles in supporting the primary participants through the college choice process. And so, I asked the students to nominate adults. Each adult I approached agreed to participate in the study.

The participants included 14 students, 2 teachers, 1 college counselor, 1 support staff (who worked with the college counselor), 1 college coach (a recent graduate of GBHS), and the school principal.[16] The working class and poor youth who participated in the study were 12th grade students when the study began in the fall of 2012. Each indicated an intention to enroll in college after graduating from high school. Eight of the students were female, while six were male. (The oversampling of females reflects the demographics of the school, which, as noted above, was two-thirds female during the time of the study.) Eight students identified as Latina/o.

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[16] A 15th student, Manute, was an initial participant. Partway through the study he opted to withdraw for personal reasons.

Three identified as African American. One identified as Filipino. One identified as Bangladeshi. One identified as Pakistani.

Abdul Raja

Easy-going and quick to smile, Abdul was looking forward to going to college. Abdul lived with his sister, who attended a public four-year college, and his brother who attended a local community college and his parents, both of whom had emigrated from Pakistan. In Pakistan, Abdul's mother had taken some college classes. His father, on the other hand, had no postsecondary experience. Abdul wanted to go to college but was only applying to public schools because he didn't "want to be stuck with a loan." In fact, in considering where to go, money was his first concern. Abdul's first choice was a four-year public college on Long Island. Abdul had never visited the school and didn't know a lot about it but his Anatomy teacher had gone there and spoke highly of it. Abdul liked the idea of moving out of his home but remaining in New York.

Allen Baptiste

Allen was an extroverted, gregarious young man. An elected class officer, Allen was popular among classmates and teachers alike. Allen loved learning but was less enthused by high school coursework and the college application process. He lived with his mother, a nurse, but rarely saw her as she worked most nights. He never spoke of his father but often spoke of his "mentor," a Harvard-educated physician who lived in California and regularly checked with Allen via email. Allen, however, was not a big email user. For example, one day I asked him if he had received an email I sent him the week before. He had not. We checked his email together and found my email unread. Above this email was another one from a local college. *Congratulations, you have been accepted to…* "Wow," he said. "I guess I got in." Allen

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described college as a "necessary evil." A GBHS educator with whom Allen was close told me, "Allen does not want to go to college."

Ayame Kurosaki

A first generation Dominican, Ayame was sure she was going to college. Her parents were both born in the Dominican Republic and neither spoke English. Ayame was brainy and bookish and not afraid to show it. In middle school she didn't fit in with her peer group and was teased relentlessly. When she got to GBHS, however, she made friends almost immediately. Ayame graduated in the top 5% of her class and was the student body president. In February the school principal announced that a play Ayame had written was chosen by a local arts organization to be performed Off-Broadway. On Graduation Day she was awarded the American Federation of Administrators Award, an award for oratory excellence, an award for service and learning, the Chancellor's Honor Roll Award, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) Science Award, the UFT Computer and Technology Award, a social studies academic achievement award, and a physical education achievement award.

Fernando deJesus

A Bronx-born Mexican-American, Fernando saw college as a "duty" and an opportunity to help others by bettering himself. Fernando's senior year was a tense time for his family. Neither of his parents were working. His father had a work-related injury that prevented him from working and there was a constant fear that the disability checks would stop arriving in the mail. "It's scary for him" Fernando explained. "I think he gets used to it but he's always stressed. You can see it. He's always thinking about what he is going to do if something goes wrong, completely wrong. We're at the brink of that moment right there. …They are concerned about the financial aid thing, but I tell them not to worry, it's time for me to worry, not for them

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to worry." Knowing that other schools were out of reach financially, Fernando only applied to the City University of New York. He gained admission to an opportunity program at one of CUNY's senior colleges and matriculated the fall after his senior year. This enabled Fernando to stay at home and help his parents.

Krystal Sawyer

According to Sherice Jones, a GBHS teacher, Krystal Sawyer was extroverted, kind, and helpful. "Everybody wants a Krystal Sawyer in their school. She's that girl." Krystal was an artist—she designed the RaPoetics club t-shirt—and a lifeguard. She was proud of the fact that she had a steady paycheck. At the same time, she didn't want to be "like 50 years [old] and still sitting on that highchair." She wanted something more. She wasn't sure what this "more" was but she believed that college could help her get it. Neither of her parents had attended college but both encouraged her to go. She lived in public housing where "there's shoot-ups all the time." She both recognized and challenged the stigmata attached to being a Bronxite. "As a borough," she told me, "we should stick out like a gold star in the mud."

Liz Lopez

Liz was raised in a family with "not a lot of college graduates." Her parents, who had divorced when she was a sophomore, were unemployed at the time of the study and Liz drew a connection between her parents' educational background and their employment status. As a "minority," Liz believed college was her only path to a better future. Although her parents could only offer limited support with her college choice process Liz had other resources. Her aunt was a college-educated elected official. She helped Liz edit her college essay. Liz also had a group of friends who met occasionally outside of school to review application packets and provide one

another support. Liz was planning to attend a community college in New York, but weeks before graduation she learned that her family was moving to Florida.

Michael Martinez

When Michael graduated from high school in the spring of 2013 he was the first in his family to earn a high school diploma. Both his sister and his mother "dropped out" of high school before their senior year, though both would eventually go on to attain GEDs. Michael did not live with his father. Michael decided he wanted to go to college when he was 11. Since then he had mostly done well in school, regularly making the honor roll and completing two AP classes. He loved singing and dancing and hoped to study criminal justice in college. He understood that he might have to start off at a community college (his grades began slipping halfway through high school) but was emphatic that he would get his four-year degree.

Nabella Jabar

Nabella, the eldest of three, was born in Bangladesh and lived there until she was 10 years old. In 2006 her family moved to the United States so that she could get a "better education." Nabella's parents expected her to excel in school and go on to college. Nabella explained that, "Bengali people, like, I would say it's their culture, they always want you to be like top and do everything, they stress, you know, they don't try to understand what you're going through." Nabella was going through a lot. She had only been in the United States for six years when she had to negotiate the college choice process. Her parents expected her to go to college but were not able to provide instrumental support. Nabella found this support elsewhere: from friends, counselors at GBHS and other adults outside the school.

Royal Knight

A photographer, a writer and a natural skeptic, Royal was born in the Dominican Republic to a Dominican father and Puerto Rican mother. Royal moved to the Bronx three months before beginning high school at Genevieve Brooks High School. At GBHS, Royal took advantage of the many opportunities that came his way. He joined the photography club, a male empowerment group and—later in his high school career—took college classes. Confident, brash and smart, Royal Knight had mixed feelings about college. He had a love of learning but had read a lot about the soaring cost of college. He knew his parents wouldn't be able to support him through college and he didn't want to fall into debt. When I asked a focus group why someone might want to go to college he answered, "to waste money!" Ultimately, Royal decided to go to college, but only because he was able to attend without taking out loans and because the school would help him achieve his ultimate ambition of becoming an Air Force pilot.

Shakira White

Shakira White "might be the first female president ever," one of her counselors told me. "She's got a very strong mindset, she is really talented, smart, an eager young woman who wants to do a lot." An African American young woman who grew up in the area, Shakira would be the first in her family to go to college. Alone among all participants, Shakira knew exactly where she wanted to go to college. In the fall she told me told me that she wanted to go to SUNY Potsdam. In the winter she told me she wanted to go to Potsdam. In the spring she was accepted into Potsdam's Equal Opportunity Program and in the fall she enrolled. The EOP program would cover most of the total cost of attendance but Shakira would still have to take out loans. She was poor, she told me, and expected to continue to feel poor when she got to college, but she thought it would all be worth it in the long run.

Victor Guerra

Born in the Dominican Republic, Victor moved to the United States with his mother when he was nine and had a pretty easy transition. When he arrived he and his mother joined his father and older brother who had immigrated earlier. Victor made friends easily, learned English quickly and before long was among the strongest students in his classes. At the GBHS graduation he was among the "top 20 ranked seniors." His father and older brother had both gone to college and Chris was expecting to do the same. He took all the opportunities that were available—summer classes, credit-bearing classes at the local community college, and AP classes. A top-notch student, Victor was shocked and "insulted" when each CUNY college, except one, rejected him. An undocumented student, Victor was not eligible for federal or state financial aid. He wasn't sure how he was going to pay for college.

Violet Figueroa

A self-described perpetual worrier, Violet spent much of her senior year fretting over what the following year would bring. One week it was the military, the next week college, back and forth, all year long. "Violet doesn't know what she wants," a counselor told me. In fact, she did. She wanted to go to college but didn't believe she could afford it. The military was her fallback. Born in the Bronx, Violet moved to the Dominican Republic at 8 months, then back to New York, then back to the Dominican Republic, then to New Jersey, then back to the Bronx. She lived with her mother who had not gone to college. Her father, who hadn't finished high school, lived in the Dominican Republic. Both parents encouraged Violet to go to college. At one point when Violet's father learned that she was "messing up in school" he flew to New York unannounced and went to talk to Violet's teachers. This was evidence, Violet told me, of how much he cared about her and her education.

Vivian Davao

Vivian was born in the Philippines and moved to the United States two years before the study began. She lived with her father, her 7-year-old sister, and her aunt. A conscientious student, Vivian attended school regularly, did most of her homework and had a few very good friends, including Nabella. She wanted to go to college but had little understanding of the college-going process. She entertained thoughts of going to college back in the Philippines but had never talked to her father about this. At the beginning of her senior year Vivian's GPA put her in the 2nd academic quintile. Nonetheless, she did not graduate with her class in June. Among the requirements for earning a high school diploma in New York State is the passing of five content-area examinations. Vivian had passed four, but one test—the Global History State Regents—was holding her back. She failed the test for the third time in June, for the fourth time in August.

Yessica Rodriguez

A Bronx-born daughter of immigrants, Yessica did it all. She was the Secretary of the school, took classes at a local community college on Saturdays, was working on a postsecondary certificate in phlebotomy, volunteered at a local senior center, looked after her younger sister and—when her older sister was working—watched her sister's children. Neither of Yessica's parents (both of whom were born in the Dominican Republic) nor her two elder siblings had gone to college. Yessica saw herself as different from most teenagers she knew. She had more responsibility—"I do laundry, I cook"—and was more ambitious. She wanted to go to a four-year college and for most of her senior year she was sure that she wanted to leave the Bronx. "I don't want to be here," she told me. "I live next to a club so just imagine every weekend there is an argument, some days I am unable to sleep." She ended up being accepted to a number of

colleges both in New York City and beyond. As the end of the school year drew close, she knew

she had to make a decision, but could not figure out where she wanted to go.

Name	Gender	Racial/Ethnic Identification	First generation to college[17]	Low-income[18]	Academic Quintile	Post-Secondary Plans, June of Senior Year	One year later, had plans changed?
Abdul	Male	Asian (Pakistani)	Yes	Yes	2nd	2-year public college	No
Allen	Male	African American	Yes	Yes?[19]	3rd	Unsure	Yes
Ayame	Female	Latina (Dominican)	Yes	Yes	1st	4-year private college	Yes
Fernando	Male	Latino (Mexican)	Yes	Yes	3rd	4-year public college	No
Krystal	Female	African American	Yes	Yes	2nd	4-year public college	Yes
Liz	Female	Latina	Yes	Yes	4th	2-year public	Yes
Michael	Male	Latino (Puerto Rican)	Yes	Yes	2nd	2-year public college	No
Nabella	Female	Asian (Bangladeshi)	Yes	Yes	3rd	4-year public college	No
Royal	Male	Latino (Dominican and Puerto Rican)	No	Yes	1st	Armed Forces	Yes
Shakira	Female	African American	Yes	Yes	2nd	4-year public college	No
Victor	Male	Latino (Dominican)	No	Yes	1st	Unsure	Yes
Violet	Female	Latina (Dominican)	Yes	Yes	2nd	4-year public	No
Vivian	Female	Asian (Filipino)	Yes	Yes	2nd	Unsure	Yes
Yessica	Female	Latina (Dominican)	Yes	Yes	1st	Unsure	Yes

Table 2.1 Student Participants

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[17] In this dissertation the phrase "first generation to college" refers to students who were raised in families in which no parent (or guardian) had earned a baccalaureate degree (Pike & Kuh, 2005).

[18] In this study I operationalize "low-income" using the standard for education-related research: eligibility for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). To be eligible for the NSLP, a family must earn less than or equal to 185% of the Federal Poverty Line.

[19] According to data provided by the college counselor, Allen is a "low income" student. However, interviews with Allen suggested otherwise. Allen was distressed that his mother's income (she is a registered nurse) made him ineligible for federal and state grants.

Data Collection

Data sources for this dissertation included surveys, written documents, photographs, observations, interviews and focus groups. I surveyed the entire senior class in the fall. In the spring, I conducted a follow-up survey with my primary participants.[20] Written documents were collected throughout the project. I collected publically available demographic and academic information about the school from the New York City Department of Education, the New York State Department of Education and from a financial aid report posted online by the United States Department of Education. I collected official Genevieve Brooks High School documents (e.g., syllabi, class handouts, the school's mission statement, reports completed by the college counselor) from administrators and teachers. I also collected the "bureaucratic texts" (Taylor, 1996) that are central to the college application process (e.g., college applications, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid) and personal texts (e.g., Facebook messages, college admission essays) that are just as important. Photographs were taken to document what Barton and Hamilton (1998) refer to as the visual literacy environment. I photographed the school hallways and college office, the buildings' exterior façade and a number of nearby buildings.

Observations were conducted between October of 2012 and June of 2013. These observations were conducted, on average, two days per week. Although I conducted observations throughout the school (e.g., classrooms, the auditorium, the principal's meeting room), most of my observations were conducted in the college office and in a classroom in which a college and life readiness class was held. During most observations I collected field notes as I sat observing what was transpiring around me. When it seemed improper to take notes *in situ*, I recorded my observations, impressions and reflections as soon as possible afterward.

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[20] 108 of 113 members of the senior class completed the initial survey. Thirteen of the 14 student participants completed the second survey in the spring.

The observational strategies I employed during my year at the school depended upon the context of the given observation. For example, when the college counselor held "Financial Aid Night" I sat in the corner of the room where the event was held and jotted down what I saw and the various literacies (written, digital, visual) that were enacted during the event. On other occasions I took on the role of a participant observer (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). I helped students with essays, chatted with students and staff about the prom, and answered questions about the schools students were applying to (if I thought I knew the answer). As the months passed by I got to know some, though not all, of my student participants quite well. Much of what I learned over the course of this study was the result of informal, unplanned conversations.

Between December 2012 and June 2013 I conducted at least one "semi-structured" (Creswell, 2009) interview with each participant. After the students graduated from high school I lost contact with some participants, though I did keep in touch with most students via email or phone. I conducted follow-up interviews with four students. However, I was able to conduct follow-up interviews with four of the students after they had completed their first semester of college. Each interview followed a protocol. However, I also deviated from the protocol at times and encouraged the participants to do the same. Such an approach enabled me to react to what individual participants were saying, and helped the participants to share what they found to be most important. Most interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour. During this time I asked students general questions about their lives and their school and more targeted questions about the college preparation process. Because I was foregrounding the role of texts and textuality in the college-going process I also asked students to talk about how reading, writing and other discursive practices influenced their college choice process.

In addition to one-on-one interviews, I also held two focus groups with the primary participants. Eleven students participated in the first focus group, which was held in a school conference room in March of 2013. Seven students participated in the second focus group, which was held in the same room in May. In an effort to thank students for participating, I provided lunch each time. According to Marshall and Rossman (2010) participants tend to be more relaxed in focus groups than they are in one-on-one interviews. I certainly found this to be the case. Whereas the one-one-on interviews tended to be more formal in tone, students felt comfortable making jokes and laughing during the focus groups. We sat together, eating pizza and drinking juice. One student would begin a sentence and someone else would finish it. Focus groups were particularly helpful in determining points of convergence and divergence. I was able to determine which aspects of the college choice process appeared to be universal (at least in this school) and which were particular. The focus groups also enabled the research participants to speak for themselves and create knowledge collectively. Qualitative research conducted by middle class researchers with low-income participants too often results in the "othering" of research participants. As a middle class white male studying the experiences of low-income students it was important to me that I think seriously about ways that I could refrain from othering. Over the course of the project I made a point of checking in with my participants on a human level by asking about how they were feeling and asking about their families. In addition, during focus groups and interviews I always reminded students that *they* were the experts. I was hoping to learn how students like themselves learned about a particular process; they were in the best position to answer this question. Certainly no research method "excludes the possibilities of 'otherization,'" but according to Madriz (1988), conducting focus groups presents the possibility of disrupting the "Self-Other dichotomy" that mars qualitative research (p. 115).

Data Analysis

This dissertation draws on methods of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003; Gee, 2005). Braun and Clarke (2006) write that, "[t]hematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p. 79). Thematic analysis frequently involves examining multiple data sources and seeking out common themes among them. Braun and Clarke (2006) note that this approach to data analysis differs in some respects from discourse analysis, which tends to search for themes "*within* a data item" (p. 81, emphasis in original). Still, there is a good deal of overlap between thematic analysis and discourse analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81) and in this dissertation I engage in both methods.

In keeping with the traditions of qualitative data analysis (Merriam, 2009), I began coding data while I was still conducting fieldwork. Data were coded deductively (through the creation of codes grounded in college choice, literacies and discourse literature) and inductively (by generating new codes in response to ideas and themes I found in the data I collected). Braun and Clarke (2006) write that thematic analysis involves six phases: (1) Familiarizing yourself with your data; (2) Generating initial codes; (3) Searching for themes; (4) Reviewing the themes; (5) Defining and naming themes; (6) Producing the Report. However, the authors are quick to point out that these phases are guidelines, not rules. "[A]nalysis," Braun and Clarke (2006) write, "is not a *linear* process of simply moving from one phase to the next. Instead, it is [a] more *recursive* process, where movement is back and forth" (p. 86, emphasis in original). Such was the case with this dissertation; rather than move from one step to the next in lock-step fashion, I frequently circled back and re-coded and re-analyzed text. Below I explain the phases involved

in this project. However, the reader should be aware the phases were not entirely sequential; there was a considerable amount of moving back and forth between phases.

(1) I began familiarizing myself with the data by reading over my field notes and listening to recordings of interviews and focus groups. Doing so prompted a number of ideas. I jotted down these ideas on whatever was closest—my phone, my tablet, my research notebook or my laptop. Some of these ideas were brief jottings; others I developed into lengthy memos. Later I typed up these ideas and saved them to a folder I called, "Notes about Dissertation." Over the next two years I returned to this folder continuously, adding new ideas and revising older ones. I also typed up all of the field notes, transcribed both focus groups, and some of the interviews. (I hired a professional transcriber to transcribe the remaining interviews; by the end of the project all interviews and focus groups had been transcribed with the exception of one interview that was held 16 months after the students graduated). The act of typing up field notes and interviews was an opportunity to recall moments in the field with my participants. The act of transcription was an important opportunity to consider: *what does this all mean?* Emig (1977) has argued that writing is a mode of thinking. During this initial phase of analysis—and throughout the entire dissertation process, for that matter—I certainly found this to be the case.

(2) I then moved on to coding. I began the coding process deductively, creating five categories: experiences, literacy, knowledge, attitude, and resources. I brought these codes to my research group (a small group of colleagues in the Urban Education Department) and sought their advice. With their help I refined these categories and developed codes that were subsumed under these categories. In short order, however, I

discovered ideas that did not appear to fit nicely into any of my five categories. This led me to rethink my "coding scheme" (Saldaña, 2009). This rethinking coincided with a change of medium. While I had begun coding using different colored highlighters on printed text, I transitioned—after completing my fieldwork—to Dedoose, an online coding application. With Dedoose, I developed a host of other categories, subcategories and codes.

(3) During the third phase I began thinking through how the codes were interrelated. For example, how are student identity, college aspiration and "views regarding the South Bronx" related, if at all? By analyzing the codes I generated I was able to create a list of possible themes (e.g., cultural congruence and college-going; college-going Discourse; counseling or literacy sponsorship?; and college finance as a literacy). This list grew gradually over the course of the project.

(4) According to Braun and Clarke (2006) the fourth phase involves reviewing and refining themes. In practice, this meant dispensing with many of the themes I had generated earlier and replacing them with new themes. This phase also involved a return to the literature. After rereading Gee (2005, 2008) I developed a number of themes relating to various aspects of his theory of Discourse.

(5) During this phase of the project I named and defined the themes I would end up exploring in my dissertation and determined how each of these themes were related to the broader argument or "story" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 92) of my dissertation. These themes, I decided, would constitute the central chapters of the dissertation, chapters 3-7.

(6) For Braun and Clarke (2006) the final phase of data analysis is the final write-up, in this case, of the dissertation. In practice, this meant drafting chapters, sharing these chapters

with colleagues and advisors, and rewriting chapters based on feedback I had received.

This phase also involved a return to various bodies of literature including college choice,

decision-making, D/discourse, learning, literacies, pedagogy, and qualitative

methodology.

Limitations

There are at least four limitations to consider while interpreting the results of this study.

First, this study was conducted by one researcher. While I met regularly with a research group

and tested out analyses with these group members, most of the data for this study relies upon a

single instrument—the researcher.   An additional set of eyes and ears—or better yet, a research

team—might have captured things that I missed. Second, like all researchers I have certain

opinions, perspectives and life experiences and it is likely that these biases affected my analysis.

A researcher who did not live and work in the Bronx (as I do) might have arrived at different

conclusions after analyzing the same data.   Third, I did not interview family members. Family

plays an important role in the college choice process of low-income youth. Interviewing

students' parents, aunts, uncles, and so forth might have made this a richer study. Fourth, this

study was conducted in a particular place and in a particular time. As such, it is not, nor is

intended to be, generalizable. While the practices and literacies observed and remarked upon

here are no doubt akin to practices and literacies enacted elsewhere, the reader should keep in

mind the tendencies of literacy practices to shift by time and place. Some of these limitations

(e.g., the non-generalizability of findings) are inherent to qualitative research. Other limitations

can be mitigated. I address these in the following section.

Validating Findings

In this dissertation I write extensively about the college choice process as experienced by students at one high school in the Bronx. I share observations, individual quotations and group conversations. I offer analysis and interpretation. Bosk (1979) writes that "All fieldwork done by a single field-worker invites the question, Why should we believe it?" (quoted in Maxwell, 2010, p. 279). This question, along with a related one—"Is what I think is going on actually going on?"—has played in my head over and over again over the course of the study. While I am not interested in representing the "truth" of the college choice process, I am concerned with *validity* in the sense that qualitative researchers often use the word: "the degree to which the researchers' claims about knowledge correspond to the reality (or research participants' construction of reality) being studied" (Cho & Trent, 2006, p. 320). Maxwell (2010) writes that, "Although methods and procedures do not guarantee validity, they are nonetheless essential to the process of ruling out validity threats and increasing the credibility of your conclusions" (p. 282). It was with this in mind that I incorporated several of Maxwell's (2010) strategies in my research design.

First, I engaged in research methods that enabled me to gather "rich" data. I conducted long observations, taking copious notes. I wrote down impressions and preliminary analyses after conducting interviews and focus groups. All interviews and focus groups were recorded using a digital recorder. As I note above, the interviews and focus groups were transcribed verbatim (some by myself, others by a professional transcriber). I reviewed all transcripts to ensure accuracy. I also engaged in "respondent validation," the systematic solicitation of feedback from participants about data and conclusions (Maxwell, 2010). For example, after completing a preliminary analysis of the data I shared my initial findings with participants and

asked them to respond to what I found. For example, when I conducted my second interview with the principal I began by sharing all my initial findings and asking her to respond to each. I did the same with the students I interviewed a second and third time. This provided participants an opportunity to respond to my initial interpretations and let me know if they disagreed with any of my interpretations. (Indeed, when participants—students especially—thought I was off track they let me know.) I also sent transcripts of the interviews to the student participants for whom I had email addresses and encouraged them to read them over and correct any mistakes.

Maxwell (2010) also suggests seeking out "discrepant evidence and negative cases" to test and evaluate one's conclusions. I did this by searching for students whose experiences seemed to be unlike those of the students most interested in participating in the study. When I found out that some students had siblings in college and some did not, I probed both groups of students in an effort to learn how (if at all) the college choice processes differed by group. Finally, I engaged in triangulation. I used a wide variety of data collection methods and spoke to a diverse group of people. According to Maxwell (2010) triangulation "reduces the risk of chance associations and of systematic biases due to a specific method, and allows a better assessment of the generality of the explanations that one develops" (pp. 284-285). For example, I collected an official report entitled "College Acceptance" from the college counselor. The report purported to be a record of all the schools the students in the senior class applied to, which ones had accepted them and where the students would be going in the fall. After speaking with several students, however, I learned that much of the information in the report was erroneous. Talking to students (both formally and informally) enabled me to learn which aspects of the report were reliable and which were not.   This triangulation strategy, like the other strategies mentioned above, helped to rule out a number of validity threats.

Ethical Considerations

In January of 2013 I interviewed Shakira White, an ebullient young woman who wrote poems and hoped to study the classics in college. Fifty minutes into the interview I had gotten to all my questions except for the final one:

Jeremy: So is there anything you want to add that I didn't get to?

Shakira: What I want to know is: what do you do when you just figure out you don't want to do what you wanted to anymore, you go to college and you take all the classes, and you don't want to do it so you wasted four years, and now you have to go back and repeat?

Her question took be aback. Was this a critique? Was she sharing a fear? Or did she truly want to know what I thought? What should I say? *I* was the researcher. I was the one who was supposed to be asking questions, not Shakira. I had entered this project hoping to learn how students in a Bronx high school developed the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they would need to make a successful transition to high school. If I answered her question I would place myself squarely into the research. *I* would be among those individuals helping her develop knowledge (or at the very least, offering a perspective) about college. Should I have refrained from answering, thereby keeping myself outside the study? I did not. I freely offered my perspective, as I had a number of times before that day and as I would continue to when, in the future, students asked me questions or asked for support.

Like Angrosino (2005) and other postpositivist scholars (Harding, 1998; Sprague, 2010), I do not think it is possible or even advisable to conduct neutral qualitative research. Of course, offering one's perspective has its dangers. A researcher's ill-chosen or ill-considered words can harm a participant or send her off in the wrong direction. Over the course of this project I was

ever mindful of the moral dilemmas inherent in ethnographic research. I was also aware that (especially in the early days of the project) I did not know my participants' circumstances and was therefore reluctant to offer unbidden help or advice. I did, however, hope to reciprocate or "give back" to the individuals who made this research possible. To the principal, I offered to provide academic support to students before or after school (though she did not ultimately take me up on the offer). I provided lunch to the students who gave up their time to speak with me (an offer they eagerly accepted). And I offered to help the teachers involved in the project by assisting them during their classes. They, too, eagerly accepted this offer.

Before entering the field I gained IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval from both the CUNY Graduate Center [Title 359867-2] and the New York City Department of Education. The principal of Genevieve Brooks High School, Yelena Holub, also approved the study before I began collecting data. I also obtained consent from all research participants and parental consent from all the youth who participated in the study. I explained the consent form orally to all participants and encouraged them to read the consent form before signing. The consent forms included sections such as purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits. Students were told that participation was entirely optional and that they could leave the study at any time.

Once the students submitted the signed consent forms I began the study.

CHAPTER 3

COLLEGE-GOING DISCOURSE

I would say that from the 1st floor to the 3rd floor they remind you every day that you are going to college.
—Violet Figuera, High School Senior, Genevieve Brooks High School

They [the teachers] always said, if you want to become something, the only way you do that is to go to college and see a future for yourself, and I've seen plays about colleges, they do plays, college fairs, college trips, they show us videos of colleges and stuff like that.
—Liz Lopez, High School Senior, Genevieve Brooks High School

Researchers who hope to understand how college choice operates at the high school level have a number of tools at their disposal. They can look at quantitative data: the percentage of graduating seniors who go on to 4-year colleges, how the college transition rate breaks down by race and gender, the ratio of college counselors to students, and so forth. Researchers can compare high schools amongst one another. They can look at course offerings and whether or not given high schools have relationships with institutions of higher education. All of these factors matter and all will be noted to some extent in this ethnographic study. However, I am interested in something more. If I hope to discover how educators at GBHS support students through the college process I will need to attend to more than quantitative data and what resources are available to members of the student body. I will need to attend to what Gee (2008) refers to as small 'd' discourse and big 'D' Discourse. I will need to take note of what is said and what is written at GBHS and how these discourses inform and structure student experience, aspiration, and choice.

This chapter addresses the following question articulated in the introduction of this dissertation: *How do students from low-income families who attend a public high school in the*

Bronx, NY develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes associated with the college choice

process?

Nested within this question are two assumptions. The first assumption is that high

schools *can* support students through the college choice process. In a previous section I drew on

an extensive body of research to suggest that this in fact the case. The second assumption is that

this particular school exerts an influence on students' college choice processes. One year of

extensive fieldwork at Genevieve Brooks High School suggests that educators at this school

undoubtedly support students through their choice process. The school did not support all

students equally and all students did not receive all the support they needed, but the central role

of school personnel in students' choice processes was unmistakable.

Skeptics may question the ability of a few high school educators to overcome broader

social forces. If students only spend approximately 14% of their time in school during a year

(Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000), how much difference can a school actually make? For

decades, educational thinkers—and particularly those thinkers who question the power of

schools to undo social inequalities—have cited the seminal study *Equality of Educational*

Opportunity (popularly known as the Coleman Report) that found that students' family

backgrounds were better predictors of academic achievement than the schools they attended

(Coleman et al., 1966). Could it be that students who attend elite private schools in the Bronx

like Horace Mann School go off to great colleges and prosperous careers not because of Horace

Mann but because their social backgrounds had preordained them to succeed? Are the low-

income students of color who attend schools like Genevieve Brooks High School destined to

return to the same low-income communities where they were raised? Certainly there is an

extensive body of scholarship that has demonstrated the ways in which schools reproduce, rather

than disrupt, inequality (Anyon, 1980; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 2002).

And yet, in the nearly fifty years since the publication of the Coleman Report, researchers have

repeatedly demonstrated that high schools play an important role in shaping the life opportunities

of students (Bloom, 2006; Chajet, 2006; Engberg & Wolniak, 2009; Hill, 2008; McDonough,

1997; Stephan, 2010; Strategic Data Project, 2012). High schools do not simply reproduce

inequality—though such reproduction undoubtedly persists—they also play important roles in

interrupting inequality. How is such inequality interrupted? How is that some schools equip

students with the knowledge, skills, habits and cultural capital necessary to make a successful

transition into college and some do not? Some scholars see the answer to this question in what is

referred to as "college-going culture" (Conley, 2010; McClafferty, McDonough, & Nuñez, 2002;

and Roderick, Nagaoka, Coca, & Moeller, 2008). It is posited that schools that develop a robust

college-going culture both shape and nurture students' college aspirations, provide students with

the academic, social and cultural support they need while in high school, and help to "link" (Hill,

2008) students to postsecondary institutions. This body of literature emphasizes the importance

of structures, practices and relationships. In this chapter I address the topic somewhat

differently, emphasizing what I refer to as the "college-going *Discourse*" at GBHS and

exploring how students at Genevieve Brooks High School were (or were not) apprenticed into

this Discourse.[21]

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[21] In any given social space, multiple Discourses may be at work. For example, Gee (2005) discusses a
bar he frequented in which one Discourse was enacted at one end of the bar and a second enacted on the
other end (p. 31). Similarly we can imagine the different affinity groups in the North Caroline high
school that Luttrell and Parker (2001) list (preps, rednecks, jocks, skaters, etc.) participating in distinct,
though related, Discourses. When I speak of the college-going Discourse at Genevieve Brooks High
School I am not suggesting that there was one Discourse at work at the school. Indeed, there were many.
Rather, I am referring to recurring attitudes, values, beliefs, and discourses *in relation to college-going*
that I observed over the course of my study.

The College-Going Discourse of Genevieve Brooks High School

Seniors at Genevieve Brooks High School reported that their school expected them to go to college and engaged in a number of proactive steps to help them get there. Yes, these students lived in some of the poorest neighborhoods of the country. Yes, many of the students did not have a single-family member who had ever gone to college. And yes, many of the students were recently arrived immigrants who struggled with academic English. Nonetheless, the students believed that the teachers and other adults in the building expected them to go to college. How did they get this idea? In this chapter I explore how a small number of GBHS staff members shaped what I refer to as a college-going Discourse. They spoke and acted in ways that communicated their expectations to students. As a result of the Discourse practiced by the staff, many (though certainly not all) of the students at GHBS were apprenticed into this college-going Discourse. They began to think like someone who would be going to college, embody values of college-bound students and ask the types of questions that college-bound students have to ask. Bernstein (2007) writes that, "When you go to the doctor you have to learn how to be a patient" (p. 98). Similarly, if you want to go to college you have to learn how to be a college-bound student. This does not simply involve learning algebra and biology and how to write an argumentative essay. The (small 'd') discourses that students must practice in content area classes are a part of a larger (capital 'D') Discourse of situated speaking, writing, living and feeling. Because the secondary Discourse of college-going is complex and involves thinking, talking, and valuing, a school cannot simply hold a few workshops and expect their students to become " college literate." A school must think carefully about every aspect of the school, what messages they are conveying to their students and how they are conveying these messages. At Genevieve Brooks High School the administration, teachers and other staff members engaged in

a number of social practices that conveyed to students a particular set of expectations and values.

The staff members at GBHS created a college-going Discourse by proactively shaping the social environment (Dewey, 1915/2004) within which students lived and studied. In what follows I will discuss a number of elements that together formed the college-going Discourse of the school. An analysis of data collected over the course of a school year points to four factors that were central in shaping students' college choice process: the visual literacy environment, the emotional environment, written discourse, and oral discourse.

Visual Literacy Environment

Among the first things a visitor sees upon entering Genevieve Brooks High School is a bulletin board that trumpets the school's relationship with a New York-based college access organization, College Entry. Of course, before you see this bulletin board you must first enter the building. Like most public high schools in the New York City, GBHS is "co-located"—it shares a building with another school. Walk through the main entrance of the building and you will see two school safety officers sitting, each one with the New York City Police Department insignia on their shoulder. "How may I help you? Which school are you here for?" they might ask. The doors to the left lead you to the Bronx Neighborhood High School. The doors to the right lead you to Genevieve Brooks High School. Walk through these doors and immediately on your left is the College Entry bulletin board.

As anyone who spends time in schools knows, bulletin boards typically showcase student work or advertise relevant programs and events. Bulletin boards have multiple audiences. *Students* see their work showcased and validated (if, that is, their work is deemed good enough for public consumption). *Teachers* and other *school personnel* have the

opportunity to see what is happening in other classes. *Administrators* see the work done in

teachers' classrooms. And bulletin boards are also curated with *school visitors*—parents,

community partners, district superintendents, and external evaluators—in mind. Bulletin Boards

are part of what Barton and Hamilton (1998) describe as the "visual literacy environment." "The

visual literacy environment is a useful starting-point," Barton and Hamilton (1998) write, "as it

provides evidence of a range of literacies" (p. 42) and may highlight what messages those with

power wish to communicate. At GBHS the bulletin boards, like other aspects of the visual

literacy environment, are multimodal (Kress, 2010), showing image alongside text.

Figure 3.1 The bulletin board at the entrance to Genevieve Brooks High School showcases
college acceptance letters and pennants of private colleges.

The College Entry bulletin board showcases scholarship opportunities, upcoming events

and information about the college application process. The bulletin board sends a strong

message to school community members and newcomers alike: this school is about getting

students ready for college.[22] By spring the bulletin board takes on even greater significance when the college counselor, with the help of students, posts college acceptance letters received by members of the senior class (Figure 3.1).

Several months after graduating from GBHS, Royal Knight spoke fondly of the bulletin board: "they were there, actual copies of acceptance letters from each of the students." He described lingering by the board to see who got in where. During my observations at the school I saw other students do the same. Many research participants explained to me that when they received acceptance letters the first people at school they showed the letter to were Harold Franklin, their College Entry college counselor and his colleague Thuppy Elders. Mr. Franklin photocopied many of the acceptance letters and posted them in the hallway for all to see.

An analysis of the bulletin board not only tells the viewer that GBHS *values* college-going; it also reveals to the viewer how GBHS *conceives of* college-going. While the college application process is frequently thought of as an individual pursuit and is nationally recognized as a competitive process, at GBHS the staff sought to make the college choice process a public or collective experience. By showcasing acceptance letters the staff was both celebrating and normalizing college-going. This is what students do here, the bulletin board seems to say. This collectivizing of the college experience was also accomplished in other ways.

Not only did the college counselor follow the "standard college counseling model" (Stephan, 2013) of scheduling individual meetings, Mr. Franklin also scheduled grade-wide events in which he and other teachers and administrators talked to students. There were after-school events. There were college trips. There were grade-wide trips to college fairs like the Big Apple College Fair at the Jacob Javits Center. Such trips provided students with the opportunity

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[22] Another interpretation of the bulletin board is the following: this school wants people to think it is about getting students ready for college. There may be some truth to this interpretation. Nevertheless, this additional purpose of the bulletin board did not detract from its other discursive roles in the school.

to take in other visual literacy environments. At after-school events, students could "read" Mr. Franklin's Powerpoint and handouts. They could also "read" the visual setting: a room full of peers, parents and other family members. At massive college fairs like the one at the Jacob Javits Center, students had the opportunity to see and hear from college recruiters from across the country. For students like Shakira White, these trips made all the difference.

> *Jeremy*: So you mentioned you were thinking about "college" as long as you can remember. What about *specific* college, when did you figure out Potsdam, that's the school for me?
>
> *Shakira*: It was at the Javits Center and it was just like, I guess the motivational speaker did his job because I told him I wanted to study Greek and be a doctor. I was telling him, and he was like, "Oh, you could go to Greece, you could be a doctor." I was like, "Oh my God, really?!" So I guess it was the way he told it. I was just like, I really want to go.

Shakira first began entertaining the idea of going to college when she was "in middle school or sixth grade" but it was not until this moment at the Javits Center that she began thinking about a specific college. It was in talking to this recruiter that a general possibility gelled into a particular goal. Shakira went to this fair during her junior year. The interview excerpt quoted above took place in January of her senior year. By March she had been informed that she had been accepted to Potsdam through its Equal Opportunity Program and the following fall she matriculated.

In addition to underlining the collectivist approach to college-going, the bulletin board (Figure 3.1) also point to an important finding of this study, that I refer to as the CUNY Stigma. Students at GBHS repeatedly talked about CUNY as a second rate university. It was a school they would go to if they didn't get into, or couldn't afford, a private college. None of the

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educators in the building explicitly (or publicly) shared this belief. Indeed, all students were

encouraged to apply to six CUNY colleges. And yet, what is perhaps most notable about the

bulletin board photograph is the absence of a CUNY (or any public school) pennant. Although

most GBHS graduates enroll in CUNY, the pennants showcased are all private universities.

Getting into a 4-year CUNY was an accomplishment one should be proud of, but getting into a

private school (even less selective colleges like Saint Rose or Manhattan) was cause for

particular celebration. Sherice Jones, the school's health teacher, internship coordinator, and

senior advisor—and a CUNY graduate—was a strong advocate of CUNY. It upset her that

students somehow got the idea that CUNY was subpar. According to Sherice, previous college

counselors at GBHS pushed private schools at the expense of CUNY, though the current

counselor, Mr. Franklin, was not "so bad about it." Still, according to Sherice, the students,

"think that the private schools are the best." Although Sherice couldn't quite figure out where

they got this idea, observations suggest that the school sent subtle (and perhaps unconscious)

anti-CUNY messages to students.

Figure 3.2 List of GBHS past and current partner organizations

The visual literacy environment at GBHS informed the viewer through representation (e.g., by showing the pennants of college to which students have been accepted), omission (e.g. by leaving off public university pennants) and *mis*representation. Figure 3.2 is a photograph of a poster that hangs in the front lobby of the school. The poster, which lists the organizations the school works with, hung throughout 2012-2013 school year. The photograph was taken in the spring of 2014. The first organization listed on the poster is AVID, a prominent national college access organization. However, the school stopped working with AVID in the spring of 2011. As the principal, Yelena Holub, explained to me, "We don't have AVID anymore because of budget constraints." Walking by this poster everyday left me with questions. If the school no longer worked with AVID, why leave up the poster? Was this an oversight, or something else? I had no reason to believe that Ms. Holub was knowingly misrepresenting programmatic offerings at her school. Viewing this poster, did, however, impress upon me the multiple messages that inhere in texts.

Most corners of Genevieve Brooks High School do not scream college. There is not a pervasive college-going visual environment (we can contrast GBHS to high schools that name classrooms after colleges or hang college banners throughout the school). The college office, located just off the main corridor, is a notable exception. It is large and rectangular, about 15 feet by 45 feet. In the fall, when seniors were putting together their college portfolio, a poster hung outside listing all the documents students would use during the college application process (Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3 nicely captures how the college choice process is a literacy practice that involves both bureaucratic literacies (Taylor, 1996) and academic literacies (Lea and Street, 1998, 2006). There are eleven items listed on the form. There are bureaucratic texts like the

high school transcript and tax return. The list also includes expository texts like the college essay and recommendation forms. The first item on the list, "Family Income Form," refers to a form that students are expected to have their families fill out and return to Mr. Franklin. The information on this list will let Mr. Franklin know whether or not students are eligible for financial aid and particular opportunity programs. The second item on the list, "College Essay" refers to the personal statement that most selective schools require of students. The personal statement is a hybrid text that calls on students to present themselves to admissions officers through rhetorical strategies such as narration, exposition, and argumentation. In chapter 5 I explore how students were guided through the writing of this college-going text.

Although many of the documents noted in Figure 3.3 are not "necessary" to apply to college, students who require financial aid and students who wish to apply to selective institutions must gather many of these texts. Over the course of this study I came to discover that the GBHS "college folder" was not so much a physical thing as an idea.   Students actually turned in documents to Mr. Franklin one by one as they completed them. The requirement list was a list of expectations, but students do not always do what is expected of them. And some students simply had different goals than those of the school—and therefore should not have been expected to follow the standard model of the school. Five of the students in the study, for example, did not wish to go to college outside of New York City. There was no reason, therefore, for them to submit College Folder Requirement number six: the SUNY (State University of New York) application.[23] Some students gathered far more than the two-to-three recommendations listed on the poster. Some students never got around to collecting any recommendations, completing the Common Application or getting their parents' tax documents.

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[23] While there are some SUNY campuses in New York City, most are upstate. The five students in my study who were interested in staying in New York City were not interested in attending specialized SUNYs like Maritime College or the Fashion Institute of Technology.

Some students like Krystal, Yessica, and Ayame had written four or five college essays while others like Ander never completed a single one. The college counselor, who once told me that he hated paperwork, did not keep comprehensive or accurate files on the students, so it was impossible to tell with any accuracy which students had submitted which texts. Mr. Franklin also struggled to meet with each twelfth grader over the course of the year once, let alone on the multiple occasions necessary to help students work through each of the college folder requirements. It is also worth taking note of the word "requirements" in this contexts. These 11 texts were only requirements in the loosest sense of the word. First, completion of these texts is not required to gain admission to many colleges. Second, if students did not turn in these documents they were not penalized. Indeed, no one other than Mr. Franklin or Thuppy might even know.

College Folder Requirements

1. Family Income Form
2. College Essay (corrected)
3. Resume (corrected)
4. SAT Test (Taken at once)
5. CUNY Application complete
6. SUNY Application complete
7. Common Application (Optional)
8. Private College application (Most students)
9. High School Transcript
10. 2-3 recommendation (Teacher, counselor, work or internship supervisor).
11. 2011 Parent Taxes UNTIL THE 2012 ARE FILED

Your best comes when you give it.

Figure 3.3 College-Going Text: Photograph taken of flyer posted outside the College Office

The college office itself would make a small classroom, but by most standards it is an enormous office, bigger than the offices of most public school principals. This room is Harold

Franklin's. In one corner of the room is Mr. Franklin's desk. The desk is large and U-shaped, which enabled him to both work alone and conduct one-on-one college advisement sessions with students. Mr. Franklin's desk area, however, takes up only about 10% of the area of the room. The rest was for the students. Along one wall is a bank of over 100 personalized mailboxes, one for each student. Periodically, Mr. Franklin makes copies of a scholarship application, a document pertaining to financial aid, or some other relevant college-going text and places one copy in each student's box. As Fernando deJesus explained, "They always send out documents, in our mailboxes, here, and they also give us some kind of document informing us of updates that CUNY has made, requirements, deadlines, they always keep doing everything by paper, not only by speech."

 Elsewhere in the room are computers: two directly behind Mr. Franklin's desk, three toward the back of the room, and in the back corner are two carts especially designed to safely store laptops. Each cart contained about thirty laptops. However, because the laptops were in various states of disrepair they are infrequently used.

On the walls of the College Office there are also texts. Most have been placed there by the college counselor, but there are also student-created texts like the impromptu poster that declares, "38 days till prom!" While Mr. Franklin makes it clear that this is first and foremost a college office, he allows students to hang their own posters, play the music they like and chat with one another   There are college pennants and posters everywhere. Most of the posters are for private schools: Trinity, Middlebury, Barnard, Hamilton, Marist, Union. The pennants are also predominantly represent private schools (Cornell, Brown, Dickson and Barnard), but there are also public schools (Rutgers, Tennessee State, Florida A&M, CUNY).

As one might expect, this is the most college-themed room in the school. As noted above,

other areas of the school did not broadcast an explicitly college-going visual literacy

environment. The visual environment elsewhere in the school did reflect the school's

commitment to preparing students who would be academically qualified for college. For

example, the Common Core State Standards were posted in most classrooms I visited. But

information related to particular colleges, to college applications, federal aid and scholarships

could only be found in the college office. Fortunately, the visual literacy environment is but one

part of a school's environment, a small slice of a college-going Discourse. Just as important is

what can be referred to as the emotional environment.

Emotional Environment

Central to Gee's (2005, 2008) theory of Discourse is that language is enacted in particular

social spaces and these social spaces play an important role in establishing, maintaining and

changing the languages spoken and the Discourses practiced. Such social spaces are

characterized by an emotional environment or climate. Inner city schools have long been

critiqued for their inability to maintain a safe, nurturing emotional environment (Kozol, 1991;

Mateu-Gelabert & Lune, 2007). Mateu-Gelabert and Lune (2007), for example, describe a

school in which student misbehavior, compounded by the administration's inability to deal with

the behavior, resulted in a climate that made teaching and learning all but impossible. In

describing his experiences in a public high school in Yonkers, New York, Christopher Jimenez

writes that "you have to try real hard to become noticed within such a big crowd and the

experience, when speaking in social terms, is almost prison like" (Jimenez, 2007, p. 195). Other

researchers have documented the ways in which urban high schools have created a positive

climate that supports student learning (Kozol, 1972; Levine, 2002). At Genevieve Brooks High

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School the students reported (and I observed) a generally positive emotional environment that was conducive to learning. Of course, Genevieve Brooks was not utopic. One participant, Shakira White, told me that the number of fights had increased in recent years. I did not witness any fights during my observations and I always felt safe, though I did observe some instances in which teachers struggled to maintain a positive classroom atmosphere. Extensive empirical research has demonstrated that a positive school environment is associated with academic achievement, decreased levels of school violence, students' healthy development and teacher retention (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli & Pickeral, 2009). This dissertation suggests that a positive school environment also supports the college preparation and application process.

Toward the beginning of each interview I asked each participant to tell me what it was like to be a student at GBHS. Each student, save one, told me that s/he really enjoyed being a student at GBHS.[24] "The school grows on you. We're just like a big GBHS family," the ebullient Krystal Sawyer told me. Ayame shared Krystal's perspective, explaining that,

> Well, honestly, the experience has been pleasant this far. I enjoy it very much because I know I'm almost done and I'm going to start a new chapter and my life, overall, it's been really great and I really don't have any complaints about it. Besides the workload and the applications getting done and stuff. But, that's normal.

One way that teachers at GBHS maintain a positive emotional environment is by allowing students to contribute to public spaces. For example, while conducting observations in the college office, students frequently use the computers to play music. The counselor, Mr. Franklin, usually allows the students to play what they wanted: reggae, hip hop, 80s. Over the

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[24] Shakira was the only exception. In addition to reporting on an increase of fights, Shakira also took exception to the fact that, on her telling, the school safety officers forced the students to leave right away after school. Shakira spoke highly of the GBHS staff members, but the school itself was not always to her liking.

course of the year I noticed that students constantly came into this room, whether they were working on a college application or not. The positive atmosphere of the room seemed to draw them in. Students also took ownership of public spaces by writing on boards, hanging their own multimodal posters and (with the support of Thuppy Elders, the community associate) completing a mural. The students seemed to derive particular joy from counting down the days until their prom and until graduation (Figure 3.4). Figure 3.4 (a photograph of a blackboard in the school's college office) suggests that at GBHS there was not simply a unidirectional (adult to adolescent) discourse. The blackboards were not simply a place for educators to communicate with students. Nor were the blackboards simply a place for students to show their teachers what they had learned. The blackboards—as this example shows—were a place for students to communicate with one another. When a student writes down how many days are left until graduation, she is writing to her peers. Allowing students to take ownership of public places like blackboards contributed to the positive climate of the school.

I also noted a positive atmosphere between classes. At many urban high schools the time between classes (passing time) are tense and unpredictable. It's when fights break out. It's when students lollygag, or even decide to cut out of school early. At GBHS, passing time was an opportunity to share a few words with a friend, stop in at the main office, ask an advisor a question or get to class early. Music also filled the hallways between classes. The administration used the public address system for announcements like most high schools but it also used the system to pipe in culturally sustaining (Paris, 2012) music like Bangra, hip hop, and R&B.

Figure 3.4 Blackboard in College Office

The climate of the school was unsettling for teachers who had worked in more traditional high schools. For example, one 12th grade teacher, Mr. Lupone began his teaching career in an enormous Bronx high school where he was told to be "tough." At GBHS, however, teacher expectations were quite different. "Here" he explained, "She [the principal] wants them [the students] to like you." Mr. Lupone told me that during the first two weeks of the school year many of his students walked into the principal's office complaining that he had disrespected them. He shared this with me to illustrate his perspective that the students in the school were

"entitled." Mr. Lupone believed that the atmosphere in the school was overly permissive and that letting kids get away with doing whatever they wanted was ill-preparing them for college. Although Mr. Lupone was the only teacher to explicitly critique the principal, I had reason to take his critique seriously. Many staff members at the school (including the principal) confided to me that finding the right balance of providing students with all the support they needed while avoiding "coddling" (this term cam up again and again) was something that they constantly struggled with. Teachers and administrators constantly worried: how will students perform in the supposedly harsher atmosphere of college? What will the students do when their loving teachers are no longer around? These questions brought to mind a bias Carrión (2014) documents in his doctoral dissertation. Many Bronx high school teachers assume (often incorrectly) that colleges have cold, impersonal environments. This viewpoint is not problematic on its own. It can be, however, if it is used to scare students off the college path.

Written Discourse

Adults at Genevieve Brooks High School also apprenticed students into a college-going Discourse by providing them access to written discourse such as college applications, and supporting students in the composition of their own college-going texts. Although scholars who adopt a sociocultural approach to literacy generally support the assertion popularized by Barton and Hamilton (1998) that literacy is a local phenomenon, others—and most notably Brandt & Clinton (2002)—have questioned the extent to which literacy is entirely locally situated. If literacy is indeed a local phenomenon, Brandt and Clinton (2002) ask, how is it that texts can "travel, integrate, and endure" (p. 338)? An analysis of texts used at GBHS lend support to the Brandt and Clinton perspective. Over the course of my study I noted three categories of written

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discourse regarding college preparation: (1) "scaffolding texts" created by adult members of the GBHS community; (2) "communication texts" created by the students themselves; and (3) "bureaucratic texts" created by an external agency or organization. The first two categories—texts created by GBHS community members—align nicely with Barton and Hamilton's (1998) notion of locally situated texts, but even these texts were written in the context of a global college application process. As Shakira, Allen, Violet and other GBHS students were creating flashcards for the verbal section of the SAT, there were students in Los Angeles, Bangkok, and Beijing who were likely doing the very same thing.

Staff-created texts. The texts that set the college-going tone at GBHS were those created by staff members. Some of these texts were intended to support students through the college choice process, while other documented the college choice process and publicized—for younger students—the college choice process. In the hallways, as I noted above, there were teacher-created posters, announcements, and photographs. Mr. Franklin, the college counselor, created worksheets to guide students through the writing of their personal statements and worksheets to help students understand the difference between loans and grants. He distributed reminders to students by placing them in their boxes.

Some teachers even took it upon themselves to create additional documents that would support students through their college application process. For example, a math teacher who had been teaching at GBHS for many years noticed that every year he and his colleagues were asked to write recommendations during the fall of students' senior year. While teachers were able to write strong recommendations for students they knew well, writing recommendations for quieter students with whom they didn't have a relationship was much harder. To facilitate the process, and to help students help themselves he created a "Letter of Recommendation Request Form."

Instead of flippantly asking teachers to write recommendations, students were expected to fill out these forms and give them to their teacher upon asking them.

Perhaps the best example of a teacher-created text that supported students' college-going literacies was the syllabus for "College Preparation and Career/Life Readiness 101," a semester-long course offered to some students during their junior year. The College Preparation and Career/Life Readiness (College Prep) syllabus is a three and a half page document. (See chapter 6 for a careful analysis of this text.)

Student-created texts. Student-created texts were also an important part of the high school-to-college transition. Students filled out college application forms, financial aid forms, and scholarship applications. Students filled out college application fee waivers provided by the National Association for College Admission Counselors. They wrote college essays, text messages and Facebook messages to friends in which they asked about college admission requirements. In fact, the high school-to-college transition would be inconceivable without student-created texts.

Although Venegas (2006) has discussed some implications of the digitization of the college application process, few researchers have examined how students use digital literacies to engage in the college choice process. The current project suggests that students used digital tools like messaging services and Facebook throughout the college choice process. While students were compelled to check their email, as this was the preferred communication medium of colleges, this was not their chosen medium. They were far more likely to use Facebook to share knowledge, perspectives and fears regarding the college application process. For example, during the summer of 2013, after students had graduated from high school, GBHS hired a young woman (who had graduated from GBHS the previous year) to provide students with support.

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Students regularly communicated with this student, Sally Colón, by using Facebook's messaging tool. These textual practices were important for students but, because they were private conversations, they did not contribute to the broader college-going Discourse of the school.

Bureaucratic texts. While the texts created by GBHS staff members and students were jargon-free and immediately accessible, the same cannot be said for texts created by outside agencies and organizations. These "bureaucratic" texts (Bartlett, Jayaram, & Bonhomme, 2011; Taylor, 1996) were impersonal and opaque. The staff-created texts were intended to serve as scaffolding and were not strictly speaking a necessary component of the high school-to-college transition. By contrast, many of the bureaucratic texts were mandatory. Bureaucratic texts included the online SAT registration form, the SAT score report, the CUNY application, the SUNY application, the Common Application, High School transcripts, NACAC (National Association for College Admission Counseling) fee waiver applications, the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid), and tax documents. Most students had to read and/or complete each of these documents. Perhaps the most important bureaucratic text for students was the CUNY application.

CUNY's Undergraduate Admission Application is only available online and students access the form on the CUNY website. The application has eight sections:

- Biographical Information
- Student Information
- College Choices
- SEEK/CD Information
- Optional Information
- Parent Information
- Educational History
- Review and Submit

According to most students, the form itself was not difficult, but still, they were not able to complete it without support. This was not a problem for students like Abdul Raja whose sister

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attended a CUNY school and were therefore able to get all the help they needed at home. Allen Baptiste was an only child and he rarely saw his mom (who was a single mother, a nurse and worked long hours), but he enjoyed staying late after school and was therefore able to get the support he needed from school-based staff. Peers were also important. As Michael Martinez explained, "I was actually helped by one of my classmates doing the CUNY [application] 'cause I didn't get to finish, I started here [at school], and I always finish up at home."

Although most students did not complain about the application, students were not sure what they were supposed to submit. Did students need to submit recommendations? What about SAT scores? And what about a college essay? Victor Guerra expressed a common confusion when he said the following during a focus group:

> One thing that I didn't know, well … one thing is that CUNY did not require nothing. It
> didn't require a resume. They didn't require an essay. Most of the things the past four
> years teachers were talking to us to focus us, CUNY didn't require it.

This quotation underscores an important fact about the CUNY application. Applying to CUNY is not as difficult as applying to private colleges. Essays are not required. Recommendations are not required. Applying to SEEK (an educational opportunity program for low-income youth) is not required. And yet, submitting recommendations and essays may increase one's chances of admission.[25] Surprisingly, the CUNY application does not explain whether or not one should submit additional documents such as an admission essay. CUNY does post an "Admission Application Worksheet" online which states: "we encourage all applicants to submit a personal statement in support of the Admission Application" (CUNY, 2014b), but most of the participants in this study believed that CUNY would not take such things into consideration. It's unclear

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[25] SAT/ACT scores are not required for admission to CUNY two-year colleges, though they are required for high school applicants applying to four-year "senior" colleges.

whether or not the students are correct. Because I was unclear how CUNY treated

supplementary documents such as letters of recommendation and personal statements, I emailed

the department of admissions, asking if they took these documents into consideration. "Should

they be sent in?" I asked. "Do they make a difference?" After several days, I received an

answer, but my question was sidestepped.

> Hello,
>
> Thank you for your recent email.
>
> Students can submit personal statements and/or letters of recommendation for their
>
> applications. After you have filled out the online application and submitted the
>
> application fee, you can send your documents to the processing center. (A. Fousse,
>
> personal communication, June 11, 2014)

Although the students did not report great difficulties with the CUNY application, this does not

mean that this bureaucratic text is free of problems. Students at GBHS did not know if they

should send supplementary documents and many did not know that they could use the

application form to apply for opportunity programs like SEEK and CD (College Discovery). If

the City University of New York wishes to make the application process more transparent,

changes can and should be made.

Oral Discourse

In a multiracial, multicultural school such as GBHS one hears students talking, rapping

and singing in a multitude of languages and registers. And one hears adults talking to one

another and to students in nearly as many modes. Privately, teachers voiced both high hopes and

deep apprehension for their students. In this section I describe two aspects of the aural

environment at GBHS: *college talk* (Jarsky, McDonough, & Nuñez, 2009) and what I call

college palaver. College talk refers to "clear, ongoing communication among students, teachers, administrators, and families about what it takes to get to college" (Jarsky, McDonough, & Nuñez, 2009, p. 362). College palaver, by contrast, refers to oral discourse among students, teachers, administrators and families in which college is discussed generally and unsystematically. College palaver, in-of-itself, will not help students to complete a college application or understand a college requirement, but it is nonetheless an important component of college-going Discourse.

   College palaver. In too many urban high schools, students receive mixed messages when it comes to college, or even worse, are actively steered against pursuing college. For example, in their school-based ethnography, Knight and Marciano (2013) describe a young African American man who wanted to go to college. And yet, according to the young man, "none of his teachers thought that he was capable of doing it" (p. 23). This is not the case at Genevieve Brooks. Those students who wanted to go to college (the vast majority) are encouraged to do so.

   One way adults at a high school make their expectations explicit is by actively encouraging their students to pursue college. Teachers can also deploy language to suggest that they assume students will be going to college. Instead of asking *if* a student is going to college, a teacher can ask *where* he or she will be going. This college palaver builds expectations and helps apprentice students into a Discourse of college-going. Violet Figueroa, who spent most of her senior year trying to decide whether to pursue college or the military, explained the consistent messages students were sent at GBHS: "I would say that from the 1st floor to the 3rd floor they remind you every day that you are going to college." Violet does not say that they *want* you to go to college. She says, that you *are going*. It is a foregone conclusion. Each of the

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participants in this study echoed Violet's words. For example while interviewing Abdul Raja I asked what he thought his school expected of him.

> *Jeremy*: Let's talk about your school for a bit. Does your school expect you to go to college?
>
> *Abdul*: Yeah. Definitely.
>
> *Jeremy*: Can you give me an example of something the school has done to show what it expects of you?
>
> *Adbul*: A lot of times they make you feel like, Ms. Jones [the senior advisor] and Mr. Franklin [the college counselor], they say like, "Do it! Do it! [your college application]" So that's why I think they want us to go.

In individual interviews and focus groups students repeatedly spoke of the expectations of their teachers. Students were not simply encouraged to take part in the college applications process; they were hounded. As Abdul puts it: Do it! Do it! I refer to this discourse as college palaver because while students are encouraged to "Do it! Do it!" they are not (in this instance) shown *how* to do it.

Classroom teachers do not hound students to participate in the college application process, but their language does reveal their expectations. For example, early on in my study I attended a class that was designed to help prepare students for CUNY's reading and writing entrance examinations. Students who had scored below a 75 on the New York State Regents were placed in this class. On this particular day, the class was reading a passage about Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs. It was not going well. The students seemed bored. Most were reluctant to participate. The teacher, Mr. Rodriguez, was aware of the classroom climate. Rather than ignore it and continue slogging through, he stopped and addressed the class: "When you go to college

you will have to take some classes that you find boring. The way to get through it is to take notes and engage the text." This was not an inspirational lecture. Rather, it was a short, informational comment, spoken in an impassive tone. *Since you're all going to college*, he seemed to be saying, *you may as well do what I'm asking you to do.* These subtle messages rub off on students. Many students liked Mr. Rodriguez a lot. Allen Baptiste was an exception ("I hated Rodriguez's class so much"), but even he acknowledged that Mr. Rodriguez—by virtue of having high expectations and communicating these expectations—played an important and supportive role in Allen's high school-to-college transition:

> I mean one thing I do give him is he may be a little more realistic than other people but he also, I think he said things like… pretty much focusing on the main things to get into the door… like having a good college essay, résumé, all that other stuff. So his main focus is really just to get into the [college] door pretty much, like the work we have to do and recommendations, stuff like that, he would give recommendations.

Although some classroom teachers did provide detailed information about college preparation and admission, most talk of college was general and therefore would not meet the definition of "college talk" as described by Jarsky, McDonough, and Nuñez (2009).

College talk. College talk—the clear, consistent, college-directed talk that Jarsky, McDonough, and Nuñez (2009) discuss—emanates from a variety of places. During my numerous observations in the college office, I observed students constantly providing support to one another. They talked about how to apply for scholarships and how to find information on college websites. They walked one another through the FAFSA and discussed what colleges were *really* looking for. One day in December the soon-to-be Valedictorian (she would receive full funding to attend a private liberal arts college in Pennsylvania) turned to me, gestured toward

her friend and said, "*This* is my guidance counselor!" Liz Lopez, a Latina participant who unexpectedly moved to Florida at the end of senior year, talked about getting together with four good friends to talk about the college admission process:

> We're so stressed from college but we know that that is what we want to do. So it's like, we help each other. We say, "What college are you going to?" And also, it's like, "So what do you have to do now?" We actually all got together and all did our college essays together and it was, "What are you going to do? What do you need to do?"

As this passage reveals, Liz and her friends were not simply chatting about college or bemoaning how stressful the process was. They came together, sharing knowledge. They even exchanged essays and provided feedback for one another.

College talk also emanated from school staff. Teachers and advisors sporadically gave targeted advice. For example, the two senior class English teachers helped students with their college essays and a social studies teacher in the school talked to students about how to apply for financial aid. Many students also pointed to conversations they had had with their senior advisor, Sherice Jones and the principal, Yelena Holub. Nonetheless, the vast majority of "college talk" emanated from Harold Franklin and Thuppy Elders. For example, both men sat down individually with students to discuss their college plans. Both men conducted workshops before, during and after school. Again and again, during interviews and in focus groups, students cited conversations with these men. It was clear to both me, the researcher, and the 14 participants, that these two men played an outsize role in shaping the oral discourse of the school and apprenticing students into an oral discourse of college-going.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have offered a novel way of documenting and analyzing what scholars have heretofore referred to as college-going culture (McClafferty, McDonough, & Nuñez, 2002). My emphasis on discourse/Discourse has allowed us to see how languages and texts come together to shape experience, aspiration, expectation and choice. The college choice process is a bureaucratic literacy practice in which bureaucratic literacies play important roles—but it is also more than this. The college choice process is also a "local literacy" that is informed by the educators who set the frameworks and the students who write essays, text friends and read college websites. If we hope to know what schools are doing to support (or stymie) the college-aspirations of students (and we should) then we would do well to attend to these literacy practices.

This is not currently being done. Every year, the New York City Department of Education measures the (purported) "college readiness" of high schools by looking at aggregated pass rates, course offerings and postsecondary enrollment rates. Numbers are calculated and a final score is reached. This score is then translated into a letter grade of A-F.[26] The Department of Education contends that a school's college readiness score can tell us "how well students are prepared for life after high school" (NYC DOE, 2014d), but a great deal of educational research calls this assumption into question. Academic preparedness is but one, albeit important, part of the high school-to-college transition. Students also need to believe they are capable of succeeding in college and believe they can pay for college. They need to be able to navigate the complicated and complex college application process. They need to be able to comprehend, interpret and compose college-going texts. And they need coping strategies to manage the

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[26] In the fall of 2014 the recently-appointed Chancellor of New York City schools, Carmen Fariña, announced that the New York City Department of Education would cease grading schools but would continue issuing progress reports.

inevitable challenges that will surface again and again as students seek out colleges, apply to colleges, talk about college with parents and peers, and so forth. If we hope to know how successful a school is at "readying" its students for college, we need to examine the intersecting and interlocking Discourses at play in school settings.

In this chapter I have explored the discursive environment of Genevieve Brooks High School. In an effort to draw out and analyze what makes a college-going Discourse, I have isolated the visual literacy environment and the emotional environment along with a variety of written discourses and oral discourses. For students, of course, all of these d/Discourses interact with one another and are experienced simultaneously. In the following chapter I show how this happens by identifying and analyzing three multimodal literacy events.

CHAPTER 4

LITERACY EVENTS

Ma! Ma! I got in. I got in!!
—Harold Franklin, Genevieve Brooks College Counselor

When discussing the college choice process—learning about it, engaging in it, reflecting upon it—students at Genevieve Brooks High School frequently identified specific events. Liz described an afternoon when she and her friends got together at one of their homes and swapped personal statements. Royal remembered a particular day when his college counselor sat him down and walked him through CUNY's online application. Yessica recalled a college fair she attended. "I think it was a good heads up," she explained. "Instead of doing my research online I was able to go there" and learn from the representatives. Shakira recalled a time she was "slipping" during her junior year and Thuppy Elders, an academic counselor, sat her down and explained to her that if she didn't get back on track she wouldn't be able to get into any of the schools she wanted. This talk "hurt . . .but it was a good hurt," Shakira explained.

Students at GBHS gained knowledge and skills about the college choice process from a variety of sources but according to students, many of the most important sources were at high school, and in particular during specific events. As Krystal explained, "It has been mostly here, 80%." I wasn't surprised to learn that students learned a great deal about the college choice process at high school. Other researchers who have studied the college preparation process of low-income youth have reported similar findings (see, for example, Bloom, 2006; Chajet, 2006; Stephan, 2013). What I wanted to know, however, was, *what messages were being sent to students during these events?* Students' emphasis on particular events also prompted a methodological question. What role, if any, did literacy play in these events? Were these events "literacy events" of the

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sort that Heath (1983) and other literacy scholars have described? I believed they were but it was not clear to me exactly what students were learning during these events and how literacy was "refracting" (Luke, 1995/1996) particular messages. And so, in an effort to further explore both the content and form of these events I conducted a discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003; Gee, 2005) of three events that I observed at Genevieve Brooks High School.

In the twenty-first century increasing numbers of literacy scholars have begun using discourse analysis to illuminate the many ways in which individuals and groups are using language to make meaning across a variety of platforms and in a variety of modes (Burns & Morrell, 2005; Gee, 2005; Rogers & Mosley-Wetzel, 2014). While no two approaches to discourse analysis are identical, discourse analysts are unified in their belief that texts are best analyzed with respect to their surrounding context. As Gee (2005) writes, "discourse analysis is always a movement from context to language and from language to context" (p. 14). We learn about a particular context by attending to the languages and literacies practiced therein, and we learn about languages and literacies by attending to the context in which they are practiced.

The three events I analyze in this chapter are a "Town Hall" involving 9th grade students, 12th grade students and GBHS staff; a "Financial Aid Night" involving 12th grade students, family members and GBHS staff; and an "Alumni Day" involving GBHS alumni, 12th grade students, staff, and a visitor from a partner organization.   The chapter is organized in the following manner. I begin with an edited version of the field notes I took at each event. After presenting each event, I analyze them individually by drawing attention to four discursive features. The chapter ends with conclusions.

The Events

Town Hall

Seated toward the back of a large open room I look up and watch as over a hundred students walk in my general direction. It is 8:45 and on this day in mid-October each ninth grader in the school is being corralled into the GBHS multipurpose room for a "town hall" meeting, an initiative of the relatively new principal, Yelena Holub. The students don't appear to know why they are being led into this room. All they know is that they would be missing second period. No one is complaining.

Let's go, find a seat. Come on, Come on!

After a few minutes each student is sitting in one of the folding chairs that had recently been put out. The teachers and guidance counselors are standing around the perimeter of the room. The eyes of most audience members are directed at the ersatz stage in the front of the room, a platform about 6 inches off the ground flanked by curtains. No proscenium arch here, I think to myself as I sit observing. On the stage is Harold Franklin, the college counselor and Thuppy Elders, officially the school Community Associate, unofficially a many-hat-wearing young man who mentors students, leads after-school clubs and supports the principal with various administrative duties. The two are sitting at a small table across from one another. A skit begins. Thuppy[27] is a prospective student who is at Syracuse University for an interview. Mr. Franklin is the admissions officer. Thuppy is brimming with enthusiasm, smiling, ebullient. Mr. Franklin strikes a different tone; he is cordial, professional.

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[27] Students called most adults at Genevieve Brooks High School by their last name. However, they called Thuppy Elders by his first. Thuppy was among the youngest staff members in the building. He was not a teacher and while he did see himself as an authority figure he established an informal rapport with most students. For example, he was Facebook friends with many students and frequently joked around with the students with whom he was close. In an effort to present Thuppy Elders through my participants' eyes I refer to him by his first name.

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After welcoming the young man, Mr. Franklin looks over Thuppy's transcript and says, "I see here you failed Living Environment."

"I passed it in summer school, though."

Mr. Franklin is not impressed. He moves on, first to Thuppy's personal statement and then to the young man's résumé, neither of which impresses the admissions officer. Thuppy is no longer smiling. There is a little more back and forth until Mr. Franklin looks at Thuppy and says, "It looks like we will not be able to offer you admission at this time."

"Are you saying I didn't get in?"

"Yes, not at this time."

SCENE

The second skit is shorter. It begins with an empty stage. Then Mr. Franklin walks in from stage left holding a piece of paper he hasn't yet read.

"Ma, I'm home," he says.

He begins reading the letter to himself silently, then aloud, "…we are pleased to inform you that you have been admitted to SUNY Potsdam…Ma! Ma! I got in!"

Mr. Franklin screams out in joy and does a little celebratory dance. He then runs around the auditorium, circling the students who are making no effort to hide their delight. It's not every day you see an adult at GBHS, or anywhere for that matter, act like this. After completing his circuit Mr. Franklin walks right up to a student and gives him a bear hug.

SCENE

Two young women, high school seniors both, stand in front of the audience. One says, "tick." The other responds, "tock."

"Tick."

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"Tock."

"Tick.

"Tock."

After this opening riff, one of the women, Serena begins rapping in a cadence too quick for me to transcribe. After about thirty seconds Serena pauses and her partner, Mosu, takes over. I'm listening intently but only catching snatches….*the loud mouth girl you call ratchet…and you think to yourself, 'Will this class ever end?'.....* While I'm missing the words, the theme is clear. Time is passing. It may seem as though classes are interminable but before you know it, it's senior year and you're almost done with high school. You better get it together, the young women counsel…before it's too late. The poem ends as it begins, "Tick, tock, tick, tock."

SCENE

Applause fills the echoing room. Serena and Mosu are joined by five other twelfth graders. I wonder if the next segment will be equally dramatic. Soon, I learn it will not be.

The fourth part of the program is a panel discussion. Seven students (three of whom are participants in my study) speak to the ninth grade class about preparing for and applying to college. They discuss academics, socioemotional matters, and a few details regarding the college application process. Although each student has a different take on the high school-to-college transition, there are overlapping themes. One of these is *college as an individualistic pursuit*. "Senior year; you're by yourself," says one student. "Don't worry about your friends, friends come and go," says another. Mr. Franklin, the college coach, interjects, "All about you!" To this, Ayame adds a dramatic flourish, "You come out alone, you die alone."

The fifth and final part of the town hall is the shortest. Little time remains in the period but before the students leave, the counselors and advisors address the students directly. This is

an opportunity for staff members to tell the students what they have been doing wrong. One

guidance counselor says, "Some of you don't go to first period. Some of you don't go to eighth

period [the final period of the day]. Some of you don't go to the classes in between!" Mild and

not so mild blandishments follow. The students are restless. Then the period is over and the

students, led by their teachers, walk out of the room. The seniors stay behind and discuss the

event.

Alumni Day

I arrive in the music room at 1:30 on Wednesday, January 9, 2013, just as the event is

scheduled to begin. It's my first time in this space, a gleaming white room on the second floor.

There is a piano in the front of the room and ample space for a full band or orchestra. On this

day, however, there will be no band practice. In the front of the room there are 12 chairs placed

side-by-side. In each chair sits a recent GBHS alumna or alumnus. In the audience are members

of the senior class and their teachers. At the moment each student is seated, though by the end of

the event they will run out of seats and more than thirty students will be standing. (Is there a

school in urban America, I wonder, that is not overcrowded?) Outside the window the Harlem

River is visible and beyond that, Manhattan. After more than a month of planning, Alumni Day

has arrived.

The practice of inviting recent alumni to speak to members of a senior class about life

after high school is becoming increasingly common across the city. More and more high schools

are seeing the value in this model of peer-to-peer advisement. On days such as these recently

graduated students can talk to high school seniors (many of whom they knew as classmates)

about what to expect in college or the workplace, what they did right, and what they wished they

had done differently. One organization that is helping to spread this practice across the city is

College Entry, the organization that placed Mr. Franklin in Genevieve Brooks. College Entry

holds an Alumni Day in each school where they have a college counselor placed. They provide

pizza, soda and gift cards as an inducement for students to actively participate. On this day,

College Entry sent their newly hired chief financial officer, the presence of whom made Mr.

Franklin nervous.

At 1:45 a lively and expectant spirit fills the room. Recent GBHS graduates are here to

bestow their wisdom on this year's seniors. GBHS students are chatting quietly. Then Mr.

Franklin calls the room to order.

"This is something we do every year," he says. "Think about all those questions you have

that you never wanted to ask before."

Mr. Franklin introduces Ms. Matias, the College Entry CFO. Ms. Matias makes a point of

letting the students know that College Entry is putting this event on and that their organization

has relationships with 12 colleges and universities. Such relationships, she explains, can make a

big difference in terms of getting financial aid. Ms. Matias then turns the program over to the

students.

The twelve students introduce themselves, each one telling us where s/he is studying or

(as is the case with one young man) working. Most are attending four-year schools. A balance

of public and private schools are represented. One young woman attending a private college in

upstate New York through the Higher Education Opportunity Program explains that, "HEOP was

the best thing that ever happened to me." Another young woman offers a cautionary tale. Her

bad habits in high school, she explains, led her to a community college. But, she is quick to

append, she is doing well in all of her classes and expects to make a smooth transition to one of

New York City's public four-year colleges. One student attending a private, for-profit college glances at her co-panelists and says, "No offense, but I'm getting an education you couldn't get at a public college. Only 16 students in each class." This young woman explains that she received a great financial aid package her first year, but now the aid has disappeared. She must now take out loans.

After the introductions, the floor is opened for questions. While most of the 113 members of the senior class are in attendance, there are surprisingly few questions.

"What has been the most difficult part of going to college?"

"Do you feel poor?"

This last question elicits murmurs from the audience and appears to shock the panelists. To my ears, the question gets at the heart of so many students' fears regarding the college-going process. None of the panelists, however, are interested in taking up this idea. One panelist deflects the question by responding impassively, "No, my mom sends me money."

After a few more questions and answers Ms. Matias thanks the panelists for attending the event and wraps up the session. The 45-minute period has ended. Most students head toward the exits, though some linger to talk to old friends who are now big time college students.

Financial Aid Night

The date is January 10, 2013. GBHS does not typically hold more than one college-related event a month, but here we are, just one day after the Alumni Day and it's time for the annual Financial Aid Night. Nine days earlier, on January 1, fafsa.gov, the federal government's online financial aid service went live. Across the country students and their families were now able to begin applying for student aid. At GBHS, staff members knew that students were

unlikely to apply on their own. It was up to the school to introduce students and their families to the federal site and the overarching process. This was not true for all families. Some families had done this before with elder siblings. Some parents had gone through the process themselves, like Yessica's mom who had recently graduated from a local community college. Most families, however, were not familiar with the process because they had never attended college or, as was the case with Abdul's mother, they had gone to college back home in their nation of origin. Without the school, many of the families would not know how to go about financing college.

Without the families understanding the financial aid process, the school will not reach its "numbers." Recently, the Department of Education has introduced a new metric to its Progress Reports: percentage of students enrolled in college or public service. The organizers of the event, Mr. Franklin, Thuppy, along with members of the administration, were hoping for a good turn-out. Phone calls were made. Students were reminded. Baked chicken and yellow rice was ordered. How many parents and guardians of the 113 seniors would attend?

The event was scheduled to begin at 5:30 but at 5:35 there are only seven parents in attendance. Over the next twenty minutes, more parents trickle in. As they do they are given a three-page handout—"Types of Aid"—and encouraged to take a drink and a plate of food. Mr. Franklin, who is running the session, stands at the front of the room waiting. Many of the students I see hanging around the college office are here as well. They are clumped in a scrum at the front of the room. The parents are scattered about the room. Finally, at 5:50 Mr. Franklin begins. After a quick welcome and introduction he begins a PowerPoint presentation. He outlines the steps to high school graduation, explaining the importance of credit accumulation and completing the Regents, New York State's high stakes high school exit examinations. He then segues into what he calls a "recap"—a quick summary of what students should have done

already. There are two items on the list: "Applied to CUNY & SUNY" and "Taken SAT at least twice."

He then transitions to the theme of the night, financial aid. As he puts it, "We all need some assistance." Franklin explains that, "There are three major types of financial aid: loans, grants and work study." He spends about a minute on each one and then moves on to more detailed information. He introduces the Stafford Loan, the Perkins Loan, the Pell Grant, and New York State's Tuition Assistance Program. He goes through this section quickly, not stopping to ask for or field questions. To access these programs, Mr. Franklin and Thuppy explain, students must fill out a financial aid application. In a few moments Mr. Franklin will explain the application but before he does so Elders interjects, telling the parents, *None of this matters if your child doesn't graduate. Every year we have students who don't walk. It can be one gym credit. One Regents you didn't pass. That's all it takes.* Thuppy doesn't belabor the point, but he wants to put this whole college thing in perspective.

Mr. Franklin then takes over, introducing parents to the linchpin of the federal aid program: the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. Mr. Franklin begins by explaining how easy the FAFSA is.

"Back in my time," Mr. Franklin recalls, "the FAFSA was like *this long* [he extends his arms outward in each way. He's got a long wingspan. A former college basketball player, Mr. Franklin is over six feet tall.] Page after page."

Thuppy interjects, "Now it's easy."

To my left there is a Latino man. He is the father of Eduardo, a member of the senior class. Eduardo's father is trying to follow what's going on but seems to be having a great deal of difficulty. Mr. Franklin types "fafsa.gov" on the screen, and then changes screens. Eduardo's

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father hasn't gotten down the notes and is very frustrated. Mr. Franklin explains that there is a legitimate FAFSA website and an illegitimate one. One mustn't go to the wrong sight.

"FAFSA stands for free application for federal student aid. It shouldn't cost anything," says Thuppy.

Eduoardo's father, who is not sure what the correct address is, calls his son over.

"*Ven aca*."

Eduardo comes begrudgingly. He wants to be sitting with his friends.

"I know all this," he tells his father in English and walks back to her friends.

Throughout the presentation Eduardo is talking to his friends and this upsets his father who truly wants to understand what's going on. Eduardo's brother graduated from GBHS a few years earlier; he was an exceptional student and got a full ride to a competitive liberal arts college in Pennsylvania. Eduardo has always seemed to me to be concerned about doing well in school, but other adults in the school tell me he is not like his brother. (Five months later Eduardo will have to decide what to do when he doesn't get into the four-year school he had hoped to get into and doesn't receive any scholarships.)

The final part of the presentation is entitled "Where is the money?" Here Mr. Franklin and Thuppy explain how to access non-governmental money. They tell the audience you can get scholarship money, "where you work…where you worship…where you eat." Mr. Franklin provides an example, a McDonald's scholarship. He encourages parents to seek out small scholarships, "While everyone is going for the 20- and 30-thousand scholarship I'm going to go small: $100, $500. It adds up."

Then they make a brief aside regarding undocumented parents and students. Their choice of language here is revealing. Rather than use words like "undocumented" or "legal," they talk about "status." They encourage parents to come talk to them privately after the presentation.

Before closing, Mr. Franklin quickly introduces two additional applications, and then offers some parenting advice. To apply for state financial aid, parents are told to go to hesc.ny.gov. Mr. Franklin also briefly discusses the CSS (College Scholarship Service) Profile, a form used by many colleges to determine private scholarship eligibility. He then offers an aside on parenting. Sometimes, Mr. Franklin says, students don't do what they're supposed to be doing. They begin to slack off. At times like these, parents need to "take out the belt." The students are not sure what to make of this statement. They have great affection for Mr. Franklin, a young man who grew up just a few miles from the school. Is he kidding? One student voices his unease.

"That's right," Mr. Franklin repeats, without a trace of a grin. "Take out the belt."

Mr. Franklin then thanks the parents for attending and encourages them to come see him individually either right away or at a later date. A few parents stay behind to speak with the counselors. The rest file out of the room. Some have their children in tow while others walk out alone.

The Analysis

What can these events tell us about how college-going is framed by GBHS staff and experienced by students? How do the small 'd' discourses of college-going relate to the behaviors, values and feelings enacted and promulgated around college-going? In this section I analyze the events presented above by attending to four elements of capital 'D' Discourse: ideological framing; languages and texts; genres; and positioning. Ideological framing refers to

the ways college is depicted, specifically in relation to the wider sociopolitical world. What I refer to as ideological framing is closely related to what Fairclough (2003) terms "ways of representing."[28]

I use the word *language* in the popular sense of the word: a system of spoken or written communication. *Text*, on the other hand refers to a written stretch of language that functions as a unity. *Genre* refers to a "particular type of text or social practice" (Baker and Ellege, 2011, p. 53) such as a dramatic skit, a personal essay or a bureaucratic form. Finally, *positioning* refers to how students and their families are physically and pedagogically situated. Are they positioned as "depositories" as Freire (1972) uses the word, or are students and families positioned as active participants in a knowledge-generating educational practice? The table below summarizes the analysis that follows.

	Town Hall	**Alumni Day**	**Financial Aid Night**
Ideological Framing	College-Going as Personal Journey and Individual Responsibility	College-Going as Lived Experience	College-Going as Operational Procedure
Languages and Texts	Standard American English, AAVE[29]; Bureaucratic texts (resume, transcript, acceptance letter)	Standard American English; Three phrases written on the whiteboard	Standard American English; Three-page handout entitled "Types of Aid"
Genres	Dramatic skits, rap/spoken word poem, syncretic *testimonio*, mini-lecture	Panel presentation	Lecture, informal discussion
Positioning of 12th grade students	Very active	Passive	Very passive

Table 4.1 Discursive features at three GBHS events

[28] Fairclough (2003) discusses a number of orders of discourse including ways of acting and ways of being and ways of representing. For Fairclough (2003), "ways of representing" refers to the relationship of the text to "the wider physical and social word" (p. 27).
[29] African American Vernacular English

Town Hall: College-Going as a Personal Journey and Individual Responsibility

The Town Hall framed college-going as a personal journey and an individual responsibility. The audience members learned that this abstract entity we call "college" has a personal face. In the first skit this face was personified by Mr. Franklin who played an admissions officer. In the second skit, an ecstatic, recently-admitted student (played by Mr. Franklin) was meant to show the joy that can result from a job well done. It was also meant as a counterweight to the gloomier skit that opened the event. College choice, we are shown, can be both personally fulfilling and disappointing. The third part of the town hall—Serena and Mosu's rap—suggested a related, though slightly different, take on the college preparation process. Allowing Serena and Mosu to address the audience tells us something about how the school envisions the relationship between college and student voice. Some scholars have described educational spaces as inherently problematic for working class students and students of color who must decide whether to be true to one's primary discourse or take on the discursive norms of the dominant group (Obgu, 2003; Willis, 1977). However, when Serena and Mosu stand in front of 150 students and recite a poem by heart and from their heart about the tribulations of high school and their voyage to college, it becomes clear that college need not entail the abandonment of one's primary way of living in the world. When Serena and Mosu join their classmates and speak frankly about the ups and downs of the college search process, the college-going process comes into focus (for both performers and audience) as a realistic enterprise, *but also an individualistic one*. Absent from the town hall was any talk of community, family and peer support.

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The Town Hall also showcased multiple languages, texts and genres. In contrast to the other events described below, participants spoke in Standard American English *and* African American Vernacular English (Smitherman, 1999), as during the rap. The decision to allow—indeed, encourage—Serena and Mosu to recite a rhyme that drew on multiple discourse styles is particularly significant when we keep in mind the pedagogical value of translanguaging. As García and Leiva (2014) write, "the flexible use of linguistic resources… [offers great] potential in liberating the voices of language minoritized students" (p. 200). Serena and Mosu's rap represented both a language and a genre that are typically marginalized in school settings. This was not the case here.

The texts that figured into the Town Hall were also atypical public school texts. In weighing whether or not to accept a prospective student (played by Thuppy), the Syracuse admissions officer (played by Mr. Franklin) attended to a bureaucratic text (the student's transcript) and the student's résumé. The type of essayistic text most frequently seen in American classrooms was nowhere to be seen. The texts displayed during the first skit were meaningful, personal, telling, and powerful. It was after reviewing the texts that Mr. Franklin "denied" the prospective student. In the second skit, the text is also meaningful and telling. This one, however, is even more powerful than the previous texts as it had the imprimatur of the university. This is one of the collegiate texts that lives prominently in the public imagination—the document that arrives and delivers the final yes or no verdict. Today these letters are increasingly digital, but their symbolic heft is little changed.

The event featured an array of genres. Fairclough (2003) tells us that genres reveal the relationship of the text to the event and such was the case here. The multiple genres reflected multiple voices, multiple participants and multiple perspectives. In addition to drama, rap, and

lecture, we hear authentic words of reflection and advice spoken by student leaders. These words bring to mind what Gutiérrez (2008) terms a syncretic *testimonio*:

> a hybrid text, a sociopolitical narrative shared orally and witnessed in an intimate and respectful learning community and, at the same time, written using the traditional conventions of academic texts … (p. 149).

Tynasia, Allen, Ayame, Yessica, Mosu, Serena and Albert each stood in front of the audience and spoke honestly (or so it seemed to me) about their struggles at the school. Ayame talked about the importance of good grades. In the ninth grade, Ayame explained, she had received what she considered a low grade in math (an 85). She redoubled her efforts and in time the grade rose. Her depiction of an 85 as a "low grade" elicited a collective groan from the audience. Still, Ayame kept at it. She knew what she wanted to say and she said it.

Mosu, a young woman bursting with self-confidence, talked about how she was targeted during her freshman year because of her studious ways and her dark skin. Mosu talked about the pain she felt and later, how she was able to discard her "fake friends" and seek out new ones. (Eight months later, on their graduation day, Mosu would stand in front of an audience of many hundred family members and friends and give a breathtaking rendition of the Star Spangled Banner.)

Finally, it is important to consider how the 12th grade students were positioned during this event. Although the seniors were not active during the entire event, they were active during most of it. Mosu and Serena cowrote a poem and performed it together. Allen, Ayame and the other participants were positioned as knowledge-carriers. It was they who told the ninth grade what they had experienced, what had gone well, what they wished they had done differently. While the ninth graders were not similarly positioned as active knowledge-carriers they were most rapt

when their fellow students were on stage. During this literacy event the seven 12th grade

students were not idle depositories, but poets and leaders.

Alumni Day: College-Going as Lived Experience

The Alumni Day framed college-going as a tangible and realistic accomplishment. It

gave priority to the voices of 18, 19, and 20-year old African American and Latino Bronxites

who had made it through one of the most segregated school systems in the country (Kucsera &

Orfield, 2014) and were continuing their education at college and (in the case of one young man)

the workplace. The Alumni Day also presented college as multiple: each student's story was

different. There were public, private and proprietary (for-profit) institutions represented. There

were two-and four-year colleges represented. The students in attendance (nearly the entire senior

class) had the opportunity to hear true stories from people they knew. Although some high

schools have made institutional commitments to supporting their students' college-going

aspirations (Chajet, 2006; Conley, 2010), students who attend high poverty schools are less

likely to receive detailed knowledge about college and college costs (Kirst and Venezia, 2004;

Perna and Steele, 2011). This event reinforced the pervasive Discourse of the school that college

is possible, expected and beneficial. It also reinforced the college-for-all Discourse of

Inevitability. Of the 12 panelists, 11 were currently in college and the twelfth was planning to

enroll the following semester. At this event, to be an alumna/us is to attend college.

Of the three events, Alumni Day was the most linguistically staid. There was a formal

tone to the event and perhaps as a result the students spoke in the formal register of Standard

American English throughout. There was a single genre: panel presentation. Literacy appeared

to play a negligible role. There was no PowerPoint, no handout; printed text was virtually absent.

The only visible texts were three phrases on the white board in the front of the room: *College*

Entry, *Alumni Day*, and, *Prizes for Great Questions*. However, the event might not have

occurred without literacy, and in particular digital literacy. Mr. Franklin organized Alumni Day

exclusively through Facebook. He created a group and invited recent graduates (students who

had graduated within the past two years). According to Mr. Franklin, organizing the event was

easy. After setting up the group, 40 students joined, each one saying s/he would attend the event.

Although only half of these students attended the event (in addition to the panelists there were

approximately eight alumni in the audience), there were more than enough alumni to present

multiple perspectives regarding college-going.

Despite the many laudable aspects of this event, the twelfth grade students were

positioned passively. The College Entry CFO brought gift cards to induce (bribe?) students into

participating and this worked, but only to a degree. There were some questions, but the students

largely sat in their seats and listened or (as was the case with some students near me) sat

anxiously awaiting for what they thought would be the "best part" of the event: the pizza at the

end.

After eating, most students made their way for the door. A few stayed behind to hug and

catch up with friends. I stayed in my seat, observing these informal conversations, and appended

to my field notes a final brief reflection:

> I imagine that one of the strengths of this event is just seeing the students, seeing that it
>
> really can happen. I imagine it is powerful for some of the students. Not all though.
>
> Like the kid who said pizza would be the best part. He was kidding and yet didn't seem
>
> to be all that interested throughout the process. There were also a few moments when
>
> Mr. Franklin or Ms. Jones had to stop the event and get everyone to be quiet. I am
>
> thinking to myself that some small groups discussions or sessions (e.g., paying for

college; academics; CUNY; SUNY; dealing with being away from home, etc.) would have been beneficial. 113 people can be just too much. Also, it would have been good if students had prepared questions ahead of time. Or split the class up in two groups. Still, overall it was positive, if nothing else, it was one more way in which GBHS shows students what is expected of them.

Financial Aid Night: College-Going as Operational Procedure

The Financial Aid Night framed college-going as an operational procedure. Going to college involves a series of steps: accumulate credit, pass exit exams, take SATs, fill out applications. Listen to your teachers, obey your parents (lest they "take out the belt"), and do what needs to be done. As Mr. Franklin and Thuppy explained, filling out the FAFSA is "easy." All you need to do is follow directions. The two men who led the session did not entirely elide political matters, but political remarks were only made in passing. For example, Mr. Franklin offered up the beginnings of a political critique when he told the audience that the College Scholarship Service Profile was created to prevent rich folks from hiding their money (and thereby increasing their children's chances at getting aid), but he did not develop the critique.

Unlike the Town Hall, which was a polyvocal, multigenre experience, the financial aid presentation was monolingual and primarily relied on PowerPoint slides that were difficult to see. Thuppy passed out a document entitled "Types of Aid," but this document was not referred to throughout the presentation. Sixty percent of the students at GBHS are Latina/o, and many of their parents/guardians do not speak English comfortably. It was therefore surprising that no translation was offered and the entire event was presented in Standard American English. There are a number of Spanish speakers on staff at GBHS. To wit, many of the students who attended

the event with their parents were bilingual. Translation was possible, but it did not happen.

Above, I noted the frustration of a father of one student (Eduardo) who could not follow the

PowerPoint. His frustration stemmed in large part from an inability to fully understand what the

speakers were saying. A Spanish speaker, Eduardo's father was there to learn. He wanted to

understand, but his language needs were not taken into account.

If language plays an important part in educational experiences, so too does the physical

environment. The physical layout of space reveals a great deal about the underlying ideology or

Discourse of that space. Of course, the layout of physical space is seen by some as a matter of

function, and is therefore described apolitically. The architect Louis Sullivan famously does this

in his influential dictum, "form ever follows function" (1897, p. 408). Thus, the form of the

room (a sunken stage surrounded by elevated seats) is said to serve the function of the event (two

men with knowledge about financial aid are well positioned to impart knowledge to a receptive

crowd). But such a depiction misses the ways in which family members and students are

positioned: as passive receptors of information. In fact, may of the parents in the room *had*

engaged in the financial aid process with elder children. Some had even completed the process

for themselves. But their perspective was not called upon. Thuppy and Mr. Franklin paused

rarely throughout their presentation to ask the general, "Are there any questions?" and did not

meaningfully engage the parents. Dewey (1915/2004) writes that thinking and learning must

involve both undergoing (the passive component in experience) and trying (the active

component). It would be a mischaracterization to say that the parents and twelfth graders were

not trying during Financial Aid night. They were trying, just not in the matter Dewey meant.

They were trying to figure out what was going on. In my field notes I noted that there were no

small group discussions and no way for Thuppy or Mr. Franklin to know what the attendees

learned or did not learn. There appeared to be a disconnect between Mr. Franklin and Thuppy who thought they were presenting something easy and the participants who seemed to be perplexed.

Conclusion

In this chapter I highlight three literacy events (Health, 1983) that I observed while conducting fieldwork. One reason I focus on these events is because participants in this study identified events such as these as playing important roles in their college choice process. Second, focusing on these literacy events has provided me the opportunity to document the multiple ideological frames, languages, texts and genres that students draw on while participating in the college choice process. It is convenient to think of the college choice process as being primarily about an individual sitting alone or with a parent, poring over a stack of college brochures, weighing the pros and cons of going here or there. Data from this chapter, however, suggest that the college choice process involves a wide variety of genres and literacy practices. These genres and literacy practices shape and are shaped by the ideological frames of the school and the participants who are involved in the framing and the text-making.

These events do not capture all that is college-going at GBHS. They do not capture the anxiety that participants experienced throughout the process. They do not fully capture the important role that families and mentors played in the process. And yet, these events do capture a great deal. The Town Hall tapped into the classic American trope of self-reliance by suggesting to ninth grade students that college-going is an individual responsibility, but it also highlighted the emotions—nervousness, excitement, stress—that students repeatedly talked to me about. Couched within the framing of college as individual responsibility and personal journey was another theme: students carry knowledge. This message was sent, albeit implicitly, to ninth

graders and twelfth graders alike. The twelfth grade students were positioned as knowledge-carriers rather than depositaries. Scheduling a "Town Hall" and having members of the senior class "take the mic" and narrate their experiences is also a way of preparing students for tasks they will be called upon to do in college. As Yessica noted in a different context, providing students the opportunity to engage in debates and deliver speeches is a part of college preparedness "because in college they do that…I don't like [speaking to group] because I don't [always] like speaking in front of a lot of students [but] it's a good experience."

The ideological framing of the Alumni Day, as I note above, differed from the ideological framing of the Town Hall. Certainly there were similarities: this was another event of students talking to students and as such carried a frame of *students carry knowledge*. But the differences were marked. While the Town Hall emphasized the many struggles and hurdles along the road to college, Alumni Day emphasized the final result. *You can do this*, the event told students, *look at the 12 panelists at the front of the room*. This event also contributed to the Discourse of Inevitability that educators at the school sought to apprentice students into. Of the 12 panelists, 11 were currently in college and one was planning to go to college the following semester. In this way the event contributed to the public discourse of college-for-all, rather than the private discourse of college for some.[30]

Finally, The Financial Aid Night framed college-going as an operational procedure that involved the family. Parents and students were explicitly taught that going to college takes more than hard work and passing classes. You have to find a way to finance college—before you get there. This event was designed to tell parents about the financial aid process. It was not designed to help the parents through the process. For example, unlike the tax preparers

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[30] In chapter 5 I show how Mr. Franklin and Thuppy framed college-going as a possibility and opportunity rather than an obligation. Rather than "sell" college, they were open to the perspectives and aspirations of their students, some of whom did not wish to continue their education after high school.

described by Bettinger, Long, Oreopoulos, and Sanbonmatsu (2012), Mr. Franklin and Thuppy did not help the parents to fill out the FAFSA that evening. They simply told the parents that the FAFSA (as well as other bureaucratic literacies) existed—and informed them that they (Mr. Franklin and Thuppy) would help them or their children fill out the forms in the future. For some audience members absorbing this information was not a problem; for others—those who did not speak English—it was. Despite the resources right there in the room (many of the students in the room were bilingual) no attempts were made to translate the workshop into Spanish.

Rogers and Mosley-Wetzel (2014) write that, "Discourses are both always in existence and are always being constructed and transformed" (p. 9). In this chapter I have identified three literacy events, each of which both embodied the school's dominant college-going Discourse and extended it. The ideological frames and literacies enacted in these events were not always consistent with one another. During some events, for example, students were positioned as actors. At other times they were positioned as passive recipients of knowledge. During a 180-day school year in which students interact with dozens of staff members we cannot expect students to be treated the same way at all times (nor can we expect them to behave consistently or express constant emotions and values). While the school did exhibit an overarching ideology, there is no reason to believe that all teachers subscribed to this ideology or would privately embrace it when the classroom doors closed. In the following chapter I introduce the reader to two school-based educators who played important roles in supporting students' college-going aspirations and identities. As will be made apparent, these men held rather different views concerning how the school should be framing college choice.

CHAPTER 5

COLLEGE COUNSELING AS LITERACY SPONSORSHIP

I asked Mr. Franklin to help me first. He showed me how to do everything. He told me to go on this website, go step-by-step and read everything thoroughly and understand it.
—Liz Lopez, High School Senior, Genevieve Brooks High School

Thuppy would be like, you go to his office and try to talk to him and then he's like, "Okay, that's nice but did you do your application?" And it's like, "Wait, I'm talking," and he's like, "We can talk as much as you like, just start your application." But Thuppy, he always legitimately helped people really well.
—Allen Baptiste, High School Senior, Genevieve Brooks High School

College counselors play a critical role in supporting the college choice process of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds (Clinedinst, Hurley, & Hawkins, 2012; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; McDonough, 2004; McDonough, 2005). These school-based professionals introduce students to the Discourse of the college choice process, guide students through the college application process and work with students and their families to help make postsecondary decisions. Not all high schools have college counselors and it will come as a surprise to few that the prevalence of college counselors breaks down along class lines. According to a survey conducted by the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC), 74% of private schools have at least one counselor whose sole responsibility is to provide college counseling, "compared to only 27 percent of public schools" (Clinedinst, Hurley & Hawkins, 2012, p. 50). For wealthy families the absence of a college counselor is not so much a burden as an inconvenience. They can hire private counselors and "consultants" to help their children write essays, prepare for college entrance exams and plan college visits (Liu, 2011). And the very wealthy can send their children to a company like Advantage Testing, a company that charges up to $795.00 for a 50-minute consulting session (Kolbert, 2014). Of course, in communities like the South Bronx, few families, if any, can afford

such services and must therefore rely on their own social networks or the social capital available in their child's high school.

Fortunately, students at Genevieve Brooks High School had the benefit of one full time college counselor and another educator who took it upon himself to provide college counseling to students. That is, students at GBHS had far more support than is typical in an inner city school. In this chapter I examine how these two men went about providing postsecondary support to their students. I discuss what the men did, with whom they worked and the effects of their counseling. I draw particular attention to two themes that emerged during an analysis of the data. The first theme is what I refer to as *discursive openness*. The idea of *discursive openness* is meant to contrast with Bakhtin's notion of "authoritative discourse" (Bakhtin, 1981). While authoritative discourse refers to a dominant mode of being and saying that seeks to shape speakers' thoughts and deeds, discursive openness refers to a mode of being and saying that takes into consideration difference, diversity and autonomy. The college counselors at GBHS did not coercively impose upon students an "authoritative discourse" (Bakhtin, 1981) of college-for-all.[31] They listened to students. Each man had his own ideology, but each was also open-minded. The second theme I explore in this chapter is *college literacy sponsorship*. The notion of literacy sponsorship derives from Brandt's study of literacy in the American Midwest in the 1990s. In her study, Brandt (1998, 2001) explores how and when her participants first learned to read and write and then goes on to explore the many contexts in which participants practiced literacy. In this study, I draw on Brandt's work to explore how sponsors introduced students to

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[31] This flexible approach contrasted with the public rhetoric of the school. As I noted in the previous chapter, the educators in the school publically espoused a college-for-all discourse. For example, the Genevieve Brooks "Student Creed" read, in part, "Today, college will no longer be an option, but an obligation."

college-going texts, helped students to interpret these texts, and then went on to support students as they composed their own college-going texts.

Before examining the role of discursive openness and college literacy sponsorship, I will say a few words about college counseling in general and introduce the two men who served as college counselors at GBHS.

College Counseling

What is a college counselor? A college counselor is a professional whose sole or primary role at a school or community-based organization is to help students or other college aspirants engage in the college preparation and application process. College counselors play an important role in shaping norms and expectations regarding college-going. Indeed, the mere presence of a college counselor sends an important message to students. Although what college counselors actually do differs by school considerably (McDonough, 2005), there are standard tasks and activities. College counselors conduct individual meetings with students to discuss postsecondary options, hold assemblies about college, and make presentations about college and the college application process. Counselors also organize trips to colleges, help to organize school-based college fairs and write recommendation letters (Clinedinst, Hurley, & Hawkins, 2012). College counselors support students through the financial aid process in some schools, though this is not as common as one might think (McDonough & Calderone, 2006, p. 1709).

What is the impact of college counseling on college access? Empirical research has shown that college counselors affect students' aspirations, their college preparation process, their college choices process, and whether or not they ultimately enroll (Castleman & Page, 2013; Klasic, 2012; McDonough, 2004; Plank & Jordan, 2001). Using data from the 2002 Educational

Longitudinal study, Klasik (2012) found that meeting with a college counselor increased the likelihood of a student applying to a four-year college, applying for financial aid, being accepted to a four-year college, and enrolling in a four-year college. More recently, Castleman and Page (2013) conducted two randomized trials to test whether or not college counseling conducted the summer after students' senior year in high school had an effect on college enrollment. They found that just two-to-three hours of summer support increased the college matriculation rate for all students and was particularly beneficial for low-income students. Offering low-income students college counseling increased enrollment by eight to twelve percentage points.

And yet, not all students enjoy the benefits of college counseling. One reason is lack of time. As I note above, most public high schools do not have a counselor whose sole responsibility is college counseling. In such schools the task of college advisement is most frequently taken on by the school counselor. These counselors, however, have a number of tasks—only one of which is college counseling. They proctor exams, teach classes, program students' schedules, and complete other non-guidance related tasks (Clinedinst, Hurley, & Hawkins, 2012). They simply do not have the time to do the advising that students need (McDonough, 2005). Nationwide the average student-to-counselor ratio is 473:1. Although secondary school counselors, on average have lower caseloads than their primary school counterparts, some schools—primary and secondary alike—are particularly underresourced. In California, for example, the student-to-counselor ratio is 1,016:1 (Clinedinst, Hurley, & Hawkins, 2012) and, according to the United States Education Department's Office of Civil Rights, one in five high schools nationwide do not have a single school counselor (USDOE OCR, 2014).

A second problem that stands in the way of students receiving quality college counseling is lack of training among both counselors and college counselors. While school counselors may have some training in college access, it is far more likely that their training is in personal or therapeutic counseling. As McDonough (2005) writes, "counselors are legally mandated to have a psychological, developmental, and problem solving knowledge and skill base" (p. 70). By contrast, counselors are not legally required to understand how the college application process or financial aid process works. As a result, they are frequently ill-equipped to provide students the support they need. Historically, counselors have thwarted the college-going hopes of students of color by placing them in vocational rather than college preparation classes (McDonough, 2005). In today's college-for-all world, the aspirations of students of color are thwarted otherwise. For example, in a case study conducted in Chicago, Farmer-Hinton and McCullough (2008) describe well-meaning college counselors who, because of the daily chaos of school life, were unable to provide meaningful postsecondary advising to students.

This is not to say that society has given up on providing quality college advisement to students. There are growing numbers of local, regional, and national organizations and programs that provide high quality college counseling to historically underrepresented students (Conley, 2010; Long, 2010; Stephan; 2013; Tierney & Jun, 2001). In the fall of 2004, for example, the Chicago Public Schools introduced a novel college coaching program designed to support students through the college preparation, application and financial aid process (Stephan, 2010). The program, which embraced a community organizer approach to college counseling, increased the odds of college enrollment among students by 13% at schools with coaches (Stephan, 2010, p. 84). Stephan (2013) analyzed interview transcriptions with coaches and students and surmised that the program succeeded in part because counselors built trusting relationships with students

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and were able to increase students' college-related social capital. Stephan (2013) draws particular attention to school resources and social relations. She does not, however, discuss the languages or literacies of coaches and their students.

Ideology, Discourse, and Literacy Sponsorship

When I asked students at GBHS to tell me about what they knew about college and how they gained this knowledge, invariably the students pointed to people. For example, during one interview I asked a student to tell me about some of the things he had read while preparing for college. He responded, "Well, Mr. Franklin…" Again and again students in this study talked about individuals helping them. Some students emphasized the importance of peer networks. Other students, like Liz Lopez and Yessica Rodriguez, emphasized the importance of family members. Findings in the present study support other college access research that has highlighted the importance of family members in the college choice process of young people of color (see, for example, Carrión, 2014; Knight & Marciano, 2013; Knight, Norton, Bentley, & Dixon, 2004; and Pérez & McDonough, 2008). For example, when Violet Figueroa was rejected by an upstate public university, it was her mother who held her, dried her tears, and assured her that she would be accepted elsewhere. (She was right; Violet would later attend a competitive four-year college in Manhattan.) But in most cases, parents did not provide what I refer to as *operational* support. They did not help their children organize their college portfolios. They did not help their students write their college essays. Indeed, only one of my participants even showed her college admission essay to a parent. According to a survey I conducted in the spring, 77% of participants agreed or strongly agreed with the following statement: "I had to lead my parent(s)

through the college application process." While some students checked off "neutral" and one student left the question blank, no students disagreed with the statement.

Parents played an important role in the college application and choice process. They provided emotional support, but because most had not gone through the process themselves,[32] they did not know what forms to fill out, which colleges their students should be applying to or when due dates were. For this, students turned to Harold Franklin and Thuppy Elders.

Harold Franklin

> They give us Mr. Franklin. Mr. Franklin is like golden. Like a golden ticket. He's really there to help. He's not like there to play games with you guys. He's here to be your friend, but he's also here to be a very strict college counselor. He wants to see that acceptance letter. He wants to announce your name over the loud speaker. It's really a beautiful thing. —*Krystal Sawyer*

A tall African American man with a penchant for shoes, Harold Franklin was Genevieve Brooks' college counselor. Yelena Holub, the principal of GBHS, described Mr. Franklin as a "professional"—and for good reason. Unlike many college counselors (McDonough, 2005), Franklin was experienced and well-trained. (Contrast Mr. Franklin with the college counselor described in chapter 3 who had yet to complete her bachelor's degree.) Franklin grew up in the Bronx attending public schools, but when it came to for college he wanted to leave the city. Fortunately, his basketballs skills and academic abilities made it possible. After graduating from

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[32] Many of the parents of participants did have experience in higher education. For example, several parents had taken classes at the local community college in the past or were currently taking classes. However, the process of enrolling in a local open admission college is quite different from the months-long college application process that the students in this study were engaged in.

a public high school in Harlem, Franklin moved upstate to attend a small liberal arts college. There, he completed a Bachelor's degree in business and a Master's in business administration. After completing his MA, Franklin explained that he "was asked by the Vice President of the college to be a part of the Admissions Department and, of course, I obliged …That began a long road of working with high school and college students."

After working upstate for several years, Franklin felt the tug of home. In the fall of 2008, Mr. Franklin returned to the Bronx. When he returned, however, the Great Recession was in full tilt and he couldn't find the type of job he was looking for. For several months he picked up seasonal work at Macy's and UPS. Then a job opened up at College Entry, a program that places college counselors in low-income high schools. As Franklin explained to me, a friend of his encouraged him to submit a resume:

> And I did and it happened quick. I interviewed one day, a couple of days later I met the principal, the next week I had a job…I never would have thought at the time coming out of college that I would be this deep into working with high school students. But, as I began to work in college admissions, I began to love the atmosphere and just helping the students get to the next level, if you will. And so being able to work in the Bronx where I'm originally from was a dream come true. You know, all my family is here, and it just felt great. It really did feel great, and it felt like my story could impact one of the students at least here at the high school. So that was my hope, and it just fits me, to be honest. It really, really fits me to be here working with a great group of students.

Mr. Franklin immediately loved working at Genevieve Brooks High School. There he was able to capitalize on his knowledge of the college admissions process (knowledge he gleaned while working in the admissions department at his alma mater) and share this knowledge with his

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students. Mr. Franklin ran workshops with students during which he explained the requirements necessary to attend local colleges, state universities and private colleges. Periodically he entered classrooms to distribute information and remind students of deadlines. He held evening workshops in which parents were invited to learn about college admissions and the financial aid process. In addition, he co-taught a "College and Life Skills" class with two colleagues. Mr. Franklin also added his own personal touch to his job. He played music in his office and allowed students to do the same. He bantered with students and gently chided them if he felt they needed it. He also stayed late. Rare was the day he left the school before 6:00 pm.

Mr. Franklin also understood how important college-going texts were to the college application process. Early in the school year he posted a sheet on the front of his door entitled, "College Folder Requirements" (See Figure 3.3). This sheet of paper, as I noted in the previous chapter, laid out all the documents the students would have to obtain or complete themselves to be eligible for many colleges. Mr. Franklin also relied on his own texts throughout the process. His organization provided two spreadsheets that were intended to help him keep track of the college application process of the 113 members of the senior class.[33] The spreadsheet was also undoubtedly an accountability mechanism. Was Mr. Franklin meeting with all of his students? Were they completing the steps and the forms that they needed to? His supervisors had access to

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[33] The number 113 is best understood as the approximate number of seniors. According to an official "Student Ranking Report" I was given at the beginning of the year there were 113 members of the senior class. This number included all students who were juniors the previous year and who had earned at least 19 credits in total. (44 credits are required to graduate from high school in New York State.) At least four students were in their fourth year at GBHS but had not earned the requisite number of credits to be considered a senior. Even the number 113 wavered over the course of the year. When referring to the number of seniors I heard the numbers 113, 114, 115, and 117 over the course of the year. Most, though not all, of these "seniors" would graduate in the spring. The program distributed on the day of commencement listed 109 graduates, but even this number is suspect. One of my research participants, Vivian Davao, was listed on the program, but she did not actually graduate. Vivian had more than enough credits and had an above-average grade point average. She did not graduate because 12 days before commencement she failed (for the 3rd time) the one remaining state test required for graduation.

all these forms. Record keeping was one of Mr. Franklin's least favorite activities, but, knowing that his supervisor would ask him about it each week, Mr. Franklin did his best to stay on top of what he considered "paperwork." The accuracy of his files, however, were questionable. For example, after reviewing his spreadsheet I noticed a number of discrepancies between where my participants had told me they had applied and where, according to Mr. Franklin's spreadsheet, the students had applied.

At GBHS there were 560 students during the time of my study, and Mr. Franklin was responsible for introducing each of them to the college choice process and supporting them through this process. Mr. Franklin spent most of his time working with the 113 members of the senior class, but keeping track of that many students is never easy and mistakes are almost inevitable. Fortunately, Mr. Franklin was supported by his friend and colleague, Thuppy Elders.

Thuppy Elders

> But Thuppy, Thuppy made me cry. It was junior year, and I had a report card. And usually in my house I don't have to show my report card. If my mom open it, she'll just give it to me because she knows I will do well, or if anything I will tell her. So, Thuppy told me to come in the room because something was wrong, about the grades. So he told me, if you don't do this, your grades are going to go down, you won't be able to get into any schools. I was just like, it hurt, it didn't hurt but it did hurt because he didn't always have to tell me because I always did it right [but] when I was slipping he caught me. So it hurt but it was a good hurt. Good stuff. —*Shakira White*

If Mr. Franklin was the most important school-based adult for most students engaging in the college-going process, Thuppy Elders was a close second.[34] Thuppy's official title was Community Associate, a job that entailed, in his words, "a little bit of everything." Thuppy organized clubs and afterschool programs, cotaught a college prep class, helped with attendance, and made daily announcements using the public address system. On top of all this, the year before I began doing fieldwork, Elders began working with students to help them through the college choice process. While college support was not part of his official job description, he let the administration know that this was something he wanted to do. Because the administration trusted Thuppy—he had been working at the school for six years at the time—they agreed. In fact, half way through the year of my study, they moved his office next door to Mr. Franklin's so Thuppy would have greater access to students.

A few years after joining the Genevieve Brooks Staff, Thuppy started a male empowerment group he called Males Valuing Personal Success (MVPs). Three of the four males in my study participated in MVPs. Each spoke highly of it. As Allen explained:

> Thuppy was the head honcho…pretty much like any issues, for example, we have, whether it be home issues, insecurities, or issues in the community that you have, whatever the case may be. It [MVPs] really did act as support that people needed. Thuppy just always encouraged you to go to college, just being a good person overall, being a productive member of society, things like that, and not living up to stereotypes that people make for you. And that was always something that I honestly liked about him, cause not too many people actually take their time out to do stuff like that.

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[34] As the official college counselor, Franklin spoke to every member of the senior class and helped each student (to varying degrees) create a college list, apply to college, and determine an after-graduation plan. Some students, however, had closer relationships with Thuppy and therefore sought out his counsel. As Allen explained, "Franklin, I know he really helps out students but me, he never really did, it was really Thuppy. Thuppy helped me the most."

Like Mr. Franklin, Thuppy Elders was a young man of color (African American and Latino) from New York City. However, unlike Mr. Franklin, Elders did not have a smooth transition from high school to college. Although both of Elders' parents were educators (his mother was a principal and his father was a teacher) he struggled through high school. His parents believed that he "was not college material" (an assessment that crushed Thuppy at the time), and after graduating from high school, Elders enrolled in a carpentry program. In Thuppy's eyes he was an "average or below average student." It wasn't until several years after graduating from high school that he decided to pursue college. Over the course of my multiple observations, I witnessed Elders constantly mining his own past to connect with students. "That's why I try to use myself as an example," he explained. "Because it took me longer to graduate because I didn't go initially after high school, so it's good for them to know there is no perfect route, you just have to do it." Elders met individually with students to help them complete the online CUNY application. He helped students assemble a list of colleges they would apply to, helped coach students who needed to speak to admissions officers, and introduced students to the language of college admissions.

In April of 2013 I observed a class in which Thuppy was teaching a group of students about the financial aid process. Among the first things I noted was Thuppy's attention to language. He had prepared a handout with explanations of all the relevant financial aid vocabulary (loan, grant, work-study, Stafford Loan, interest rate, etc.), and he used the white board extensively. Thuppy made a concerted effort to use language that the students would understand. "When you hear aid, that means money!" he exclaimed. He defined the New York State Tuition Assistance Program thus: "NY State TAP is free money from NY State for NY State residents attending colleges in New York." Thuppy knew the students seated before him

and he made a point of using language that was simple enough that they could understand it but not so simple that he was talking down to them.

There are a number of opportunity programs available to low-income students in New York. Because all the different programs and all the acronyms often confused students at GBHS, Thuppy slowly went through each program. On the board he wrote down the major opportunity programs (e.g. the Higher Education Opportunity Program, and CUNY's College Discovery) offered in New York State. Thuppy then led a discussion about these programs: why they existed, who would be eligible, and what they offered. For Thuppy, this was not simply about financial aid; it was about preparing his students for life after Genevieve Brooks High School.

Thuppy was beloved by students at GBHS. As Abdul Raja put it, "Everybody was cool with Thuppy." This was not simply because they valued his support through the college choice process. It was also because students felt respected by him and found him to be fair and open minded. These qualities contributed to a theme I write about in the following section: discursive openness.

Discursive Openness

Mr. Franklin and Thuppy succeeded in engaging most students at Genevieve Brooks in the college application process. To be sure, not all students enrolled in college directly after graduating from high school. And the college choice process for many students was quite messy. There were many opportunities (as I will explain later) that were missed along the way. And yet, there was no evidence of outright resistance. There were no "lads" (Willis, 1977), "bad boys" (Ferguson, 2001), or "hallway hangers" (MacLeod, 2009). Why might this be? On the one hand, we should not be too surprised. According to the National Center for Educational

Statistics, 93% of seniors have postsecondary aspirations (NCES, 2012). And yet, seniors at GBHS not only had aspirations. They did something about it. At GBHS, a majority Latino/a school, over 90% of students applied to at least one college, compared to 58% of Hispanic males and 66% of Hispanic females nationally (NCES, 2012). One reason that students felt comfortable engaging in the college choice process was because of their college counselors' discursive openness. Both Mr. Franklin and Thuppy were ideologically open-minded and conveyed this open-mindedness to students through their words and deeds.

The notion of discursive openness derives from Bakhtin's (1981) notion of authoritative discourse and is related to Gee's (2008) notion of secondary Discourse. "It is not a free appropriation and assimilation of the word itself that authoritative discourse seeks to elicit from us," Bakhtin (1981) writes, "rather, it demands our unconditional allegiance" (p. 343). There are many authoritative discourses at work (religious, scientific, etc.) and "college-for-all" (Carey, 2011) is one of these discourses. During much of the twentieth century college was primarily a place for elite whites. Working class students, and particularly African American and Latino students, were consigned to curricular tracks that precluded college matriculation (Oakes, 1985/2011). By contrast, most of today's high schools, whether in tony suburban neighborhoods or segregated ghettos, have ceased offering vocational training. Today, the authoritative discourse is college-for-all. For students who are not interested in college or would like to entertain other possibilities, there seems to be only one other option. As Fernando deJesus explained to me during a focus group, "I think it's really awkward. They're cornering us. There are two real options, either join the military or pay for college. One of them two. It feels like we're being forced."

Mr. Franklin and Thuppy faced a nettlesome challenge every day: how to deal with the authoritative discourse of college-for-all while at the same time supporting the individual needs of their students. College Entry (the organization that placed Mr. Franklin in GBHS) has a very clear goal: college. But Mr. Franklin had students who didn't want to go to college and students who, for a variety of reasons, would not be graduating (at least not yet) from high school. How was he to square this circle? In Mr. Franklin's eyes, there was no conflict. He saw his task as helping students chart their postsecondary lives. For some students it would be college; for others it would not. Mr. Franklin did not see his job as telling students what they needed to do. He saw himself as a facilitator, gently nudging students in a particular direction. As Mr. Franklin explained,

> And you know, though I am the college counselor here…what I really want to do even before being a college counselor, is just helping students find the right path. Whether it be college or vocational school or any type of other endeavors that they are interested in so that they are happy … Although I would like the majority, if not all, students to have that opportunity [college], I know that for some students, it's not for them, and it takes a while to figure that out. But when they figure it out, my job is just to help them find what works for them and get them going.

Mr. Franklin and Thuppy did not impose college on students. Applying to college was not a school requirement as it is in some high schools. And yet, most students were open to the idea of college. This may have had something to do with the educators' approach. Far too many students from lower socioeconomic strata resist school because they believe it is not for people like them, that they must choose between an authentic self and a school self. At Genevieve Brooks students did not feel that they needed to make such a decision. College was not

presented to them as something alien or unnatural. They would not have to jettison old habits

and literacies. They could remain true to themselves and their communities *and* make the

important transition to being a college student. According to Carrión (2014) some high school

personnel try to scare students into thinking that if they don't clean up their act they will fail in

college. While this rhetoric—what Carrión (2014) refers to as a "scared straight discourse"—is

intended to motivate students, it can have the opposite effect (p. 212). Rather than employ this

discourse, however, Mr. Franklin and Thuppy opted for a strategy of listening first and speaking

second. Students recognized that Mr. Franklin and Thuppy wanted them to go to college, but

they also believed that the men were doing it for the right reasons. The students never felt

forced.

Mr. Franklin exemplified the theme of discursive openness when conducting individual

meetings with students. Every year in late April, Mr. Franklin holds individual meetings with as

many members of the senior class as are willing to meet with him. These meetings are scheduled

to precede May 1, the date by which students have historically had to choose what college they

wish to attend. During the year of my study, I observed students coming to see Mr. Franklin

during lunch or during their normally scheduled class time. During these meetings Mr. Franklin

was calm and had students dictate the course of the conversation.

On April 23rd, a young Latina student came into Mr. Franklin's office. After inviting her

to sit down, Mr. Franklin began with two questions:

"What are you thinking?" he asked. "What's your plan?"

The questions were posed in a casual manner. This was a particularly stressful period for

students. Many students were dealing with rejection and coming to terms with the fact that they

could not afford to go to the schools that had accepted them but offered minimal financial aid.

Mr. Franklin, with his casual mien and open-ended questions, was hoping to put the young woman, Elaine, at ease. At first he was unsuccessful. She said nothing and for a few moments neither said anything at all. She looked at him expectantly, apprehension in her eyes. Then Mr. Franklin tried a more direct approach.

"Have you made a decision?"

To this, she responded, "No. I'm thinking Hostos [Community College] or BMCC [Borough of Manhattan Community College, both of which are part of the City University of New York system]."

She explained that she was leaning toward Hostos because her aunt and her mother had both attended this school. They then went on to discuss the benefits and drawbacks of each institution. Mr. Franklin immediately understood that this decision had more to do with Elaine's family situation than with the schools themselves. Some research suggests that for Latina/os, proximity to family is associated with higher rates of college retention (Pérez & McDonough, 2008). While some college advisors might counsel students to think of their educational trajectory independent from their family, Mr. Franklin did not. He understood that parents are an important part of the college-going process and, more importantly, was open to the perspectives of his students.

For Mr. Franklin and Thuppy it was never only about college. As men of color who grew up in New York City, they knew first hand the challenges that their students faced outside the school building. Their goal was not simply to help students transition to college. It was to help students negotiate the many complex decisions they would have to make over the course of their senior year. As Thuppy explained to me in an interview,

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I guess we hope to provide them with a solid plan, not only how to succeed here, but

when they get out of here. And I guess that sums it up, we just want to make sure they

are ready, in every way, and we try our best to do that. Not to say we are always

successful, I guess that's our biggest mission, not only to graduate, but post-graduate.

If we hope to understand why so many students were willing and eager to participate in the

college choice process at GBHS we would do well to consider the discursive openness and

awareness of the school's college counselors. And yet, interest in and facility with a process are

two very different things. If we hope to understand how it was for the students—where they

flourished and where they struggled—we need to home in on the students' experiences with

college literacies.

College Literacy Sponsorship

Over the course of this project, I recognized Mr. Franklin and Thuppy as college literacy

sponsors who played central roles in helping students locate, interpret and compose college-

going texts. Brandt (1998) defines literacy sponsors as "any agents, local or distant, concrete or

abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress or withhold

literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way" (p. 166). That is, literacy sponsors do not just

selflessly teach reading and writing; literacy sponsors have their own agendas, their own belief

systems, their own systems of accountability within which they work. Literacy sponsors, like all

educators, will emphasize some aspects of the reading and writing process and deemphasize

other aspects. Here I present the different approaches that Mr. Franklin and Thuppy took during

three (overlapping and recursive) phases of the college choice process: the introduction (or

location) of texts, the interpretation of texts, and the composition of texts. Mr. Franklin and

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Thuppy employed a *systematic* approach to introducing students to college-going texts. When it came to helping students interpret texts, they employed an *erratic* approach, and while working with students as they composed college-going texts, Mr. Franklin and Thuppy employed a *surface level* approach.

The introduction of texts. From September to June and into the summer, Mr. Franklin and Thuppy introduced students to dozens of college-related texts. Texts were introduced in after-school workshops, in-class workshops and in individual meetings in the College Office. Students were told that there were three major applications they would use when applying to college: the CUNY application, the SUNY Application, and the Common Application. Students were shown where to find these applications online. In addition, there was a large poster in Mr. Franklin's office that listed all the colleges and universities that used the Common Application. Each member of the senior class had an "inbox" that Mr. Franklin regularly filled with relevant documents. Over the course of the year students regularly entered the college office and checked their inboxes. There they would find scholarship opportunities, information about the next college trip, a reminder about the SAT, a FAFSA primer, or some other document related to life after high school.

Interviews with students confirmed the importance of the introduction phase of the choice process. Before students could write their college admission essay, they had to know that such a genre existed. Before students could apply to the City University of New York they had to know that an online application process existed and where the application could be found. As Victor Guerra, a student who graduated in the top quintile at GBHS, said, "I just needed help filling out my CUNY [application] and I really didn't know how to work around the website. *At first I*

didn't even know you had to apply through the website…and he [Mr. Franklin] just guided me through what I have to do" (emphasis added).

Victor's confusion regarding the application was not isolated. His classmate and fellow research participant Liz Lopez explained that she thought the college application process worked the same way that the high school application process worked. In New York City public school students must submit an application in the fall of their eighth grade year that includes a list of the top 12 schools they are interested in attending. Students are then paired with one of their 12 choices.[35] Liz believed the college application process worked similarly. As Liz explained,

> I thought it was kind of going to be like, when you're leaving middle school and entering high school that you have to do all 12 schools and then they just pick you. I thought it was going to be like that, and I didn't know that it was going to be separate applications for each.

It wasn't until 12th grade that Liz learned that she would have to submit a number of separate applications and that it would be up to her to choose where she would go to college (provided, that is, that she was accepted somewhere and she could determine how to finance college). Liz and her classmates learned about the process of high school admissions in large part because Mr. Franklin and Mr. Elder had a system in place. There was a funnel of information from Mr. Franklin's home organization. There were also expectations. Mr. Franklin was expected to introduce all of these forms to the students and report that he had done so in the database. In

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[35] This is how the process works for most public school students in New York City. However, there are exceptions. Some students do not get any of their top 12 choices and must go through a second application round. In addition, students who wish to apply to one of New York City's highly competitive "specialized" high schools must participate in a different process altogether (NYC Department of Education, 2014a). Finally, although students with IEPs (Individualized Education Plans) have the option of participating in either of these application processes, some students with disabilities are placed in separate "District 75" schools for students with "severe challenges" (NYC Department of Education, 2014b). As Connor (2010) notes, New York City has the dubious distinction of being the only major U.S. city with a separate district for students with disabilities.

addition, Thuppy, who was in charge of school announcements, would ask Mr. Franklin if there were any announcements that he wanted made. When there were, we would hear Thuppy's voice booming across the public address system. "Good morning, Genevieve Brooks, today after school a Brinkley College representative will be in the college office for an 'instant admission' interview. Come prepared with your transcript, letters of recommendation…"

The interpretation of texts. Introducing students to college-going texts is necessary but not sufficient. For students to successfully engage in the college choice process they must be able to comprehend and *interpret* these texts. While this may seem self-evident, I highlight the point here because at GBHS there was insufficient attention paid to helping students make meaning of college-going texts. Reading is an act of both extracting meaning and constructing meaning. If students are not given adequate time or coaching they are unlikely to fully understand texts they are not familiar with. When we look at the case of college-going texts this is especially true. For example, when applying to college and applying for financial aid, students are asked to include the names of their parents. But what is a parent? And why do colleges care who your parents are if you, the student, are the one applying? The colleges and the Federal Student Aid office of the United States Department of Education ask about parents—among many other seemingly irrelevant things—but do not say why they are asking. For this you need a counselor.

According to the US Department of Education a parent is a birth mother or father, an adoptive parent, or a stepparent who is married to the child's birth or adoptive parent. A foster parent, by contrast, is not a "parent." (By contrast, when completing a college admission application a foster parent *can* be considered a parent.) Being told that the person you consider a

parent is not one can be alienating for students. It is best that a counselor take time to explain

these issues and discuss them with students. Although financial aid applications are bureaucratic

literacies, they are also personal literacies that probe students' lives.

Who is and who is not an "official" parent is important to know as students must provide

tax documents for their parents, but do not have to provide tax documents for other adults with

whom they are living. In schools like Genevieve Brooks High School where many students do

not live with both of their biological parents, it is important for college counselors to spend time

explaining this issue. Parental guardianship is but one of many issues students need to be aware

of when reading college-going texts. The CUNY application, for example, tells students they

can apply for up to six schools and, for each school, there are "curriculum choices" (see Figure

5.1). How should students choose which schools to apply to? And what about curriculum

choices? Students need to know what the word curriculum means and how competitive various

programs are. For instance, unless a student is sure she wants to be an enginer it would be

unwise to apply to the highly competitive Grove School of Engineering at the City University of

New York. Students need help interpreting matters such as this. They need to know where the

schools are located, which are most competitive, which areas the schools specialize in, and so

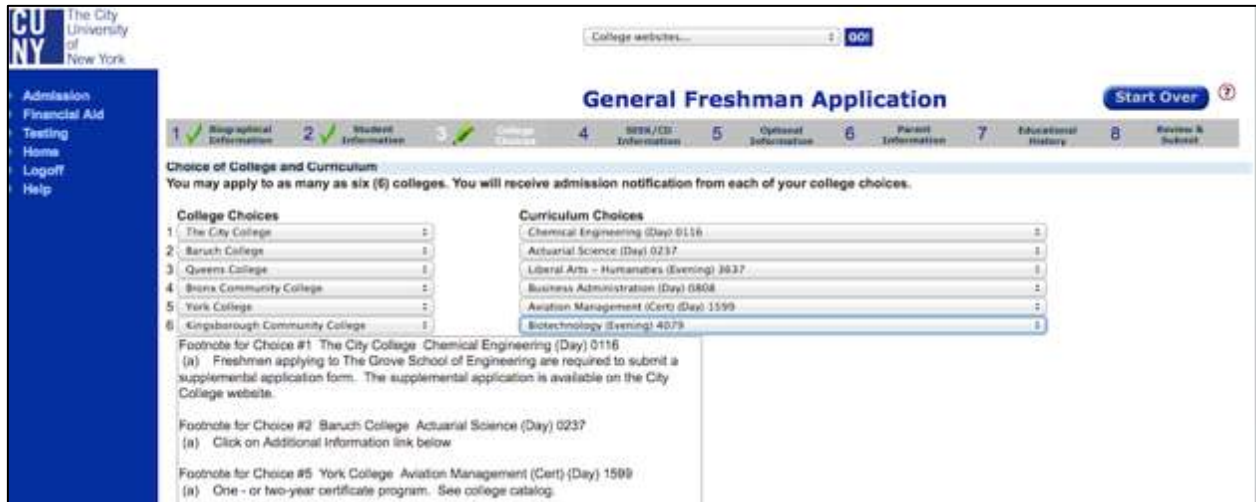forth. And they need help navigating the online applications.

Figure 5.1 A college-going digital text: one page of CUNY's General Freshman Application

Unfortunately, there was not a system in place to help all students interpret texts. Mr.

Franklin and Thuppy were both skilled counselors who knew a great deal about the college

choice process and knew the students well, but they had minimal pedagogical training. They had

not taken courses in education or literacy instruction. During one class, for example, it became

clear that Thuppy was not sure what differentiated an informational essay from an argumentative

essay. And when conducting observations it became clear that while Mr. Franklin was more

than happy to spend time talking to students about their interests and aspirations, he was less

interested in sitting down with them and reviewing their documents. Certainly Mr. Franklin and

Thuppy spent time exposing students to all the different college-going texts (See Table 5.1).

They did not, however, devote extended periods of time to reading and analyzing texts with

them. This was not surprising given the crushing caseloads that Thuppy and Mr. Franklin faced.

Thuppy and Mr. Franklin would have benefitted from some additional support but, in the current

budgetary climate they were unlikely to get it. In fact, things were going in the opposite

direction. When the participants in this study were sophomores there was more money for

college-directed planning. It was during this year that Nabella and several of her classmates had

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the AVID class. As Nabella explained, they dropped the class because "of the budget and everything. It was like three years and they dropped it." After this, students had to rely almost primarily on Thuppy and Mr. Franklin.

External College-Going Texts	School-Generated College-Going Texts
College Applications	Transcript
FAFSA	Letter of Recommendation Request Form
College websites	Letters of Recommendation
College Brochures and Mailings	Data tracking Spreadsheets
SAT prep books, SAT registration forms, SAT tests, and SAT score report	Financial Aid PowerPoint
Acceptance/Denial Letter	Facebook Group for Alumni Day
Financial Aid Award Letters from Colleges	Financial Aid Handouts

Table 5.1 Examples of college-going texts used by students at GBHS

If college applicants have historically needed help in the area of textual interpretation, it is ever more true today. In the twenty-first century, college is big business. Not only are students competing against one another for admission spots, colleges are competing against one another for students. One strategy colleges use to increase the number of applicants is the distribution of brochures and seemingly personalized letters. In an interview conducted in December of her senior year, Vivian Davao discussed a letter she had recently received from a local college.

> *Vivian*: The College of New Rockland has recently given me a letter saying that I am a
> VIP and they called me … It's a letter saying that I am a VIP and they said to send the
> letter out to them back to fill it out …

Jeremy: So you signed up with the college and they called you and said you were a VIP, how did that make you feel?

Vivian: Feels like I'm special. They said that since my grades is pretty good, they wanted to add me to their VIP List.

Jeremy: Okay. So how did they know you had good grades?

Vivian: The cards they give us at the college fair, they ask you what your grade, your GPA, so I put 2.7.

Vivian Davao was a hard-working student. A native of the Philippines, Vivian had only been in the country for two years. Her GPA of 2.7 (82/100) put her in the 69th percentile at her school. However, unlike two other participants in the study who also had a GPA of 2.7, Vivian was still learning to read and write in English and struggled on examinations like the Global Regents that relied on content-area literacy. The College of New Rockland (a pseudonym) had never seen Vivian's high school transcript, her SAT scores, her résumé, letters of recommendation, or any writing samples. It is hard to believe that she truly was a VIP in their eyes. And yet, this is what Vivian believed. Unfortunately, Vivian never spoke about this letter with either Mr. Franklin or Thuppy. She is a shy and soft-spoken young woman. She never thought to share the letter with her counselors and her counselors never asked her if she had any questions about mailings from the college. Although it seemed as though the College of New Rockland was recruiting Vivian they would not end up admitting her. Inducing students to apply and then rejecting them can be beneficial for colleges as it increases their selectivity rating on the all-important US News and World Report College Ranking Report. Such a system does not, however, benefit students.

Students at GBHS also required help interpreting financial aid award letters. Financial aid award letters (also known as "financial aid packages") are letters that colleges send to

admitted students that indicate what loans and grants (if any) the colleges are prepared to offer. These forms, as I explain in chapter 7, are notoriously complex and convoluted. The forms are critical because, for most students, they determine whether or not students will be able to afford to attend the college that has admitted them. One participant, Ayame Kurosaki, misunderstood the terms of a financial aid package that a private Jesuit college sent her. Not realizing that the bulk of her financial aid package was in the form of loans (not grants), Ayame accepted the college's admissions offer. During the summer, however, Ayame figured out she would not be able to afford the college. She rescinded her acceptance and—despite receiving admission offers from a number of colleges—did not attend any college in the fall.

As important as these texts were, the counselors at GBHS did not have a structure in place to help students interpret them. As was the case in many aspects of the college choice process, the counselors always helped students when the students approached them, but they did not employ a systemic approach to helping students understand the financial aid award letters or any other college-going texts.

The composition of texts. Whether or not a student has to compose an original college admission text depends upon where he or she is applying. Students applying to 2-year schools are required to submit their high school transcripts but they do not have to complete the SATs or ACTs. They do not have to write a personal statement or any other texts. By contrast, students applying to art schools must submit a portfolio of their work, and growing numbers of liberal arts colleges are encouraging students to submit a variety of texts. Bard College made national news in 2013 when it announced that in lieu of a traditional college application, students could apply to the school by submitting four 2,500-word essays on topics such as Kantian ethics, the

Analects of Confucius and planetary motion. One year later, in the fall of 2014, Goucher

College announced that students could submit an original composition and a two-minute video

rather than a high school transcript, and Bennington College announced that applicants could

send in whatever they wanted (Jaschik, 2014). While public universities have not embrased

these new multimodal texts, many require that stalwart of the college admission process: the

college essay.

According to the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC)

(Clinedinst, Hurley, & Hawkins, 2012), 62.4% of four-year universities place "considerable" or

"moderate" importance on the college essay (p. 34). Because the college essay is rarely part of

the high school curriculum, college counselors have an important role to play in helping students

compose these texts. At GBHS, however, Mr. Franklin and Thuppy played no more than a

minimal role in supporting most students through the college admission essay composition

process. The students who took Mr. Franklin and Thuppy's college preparatory class had more

support than most. These students (57% of participants and approximately 20-25% of the senior

class) did have the benefit of Mr. Franklin or Thuppy's editorial support during their junior year

when they took the course.[36] During their senior year (when they were composing new essays),

students got minimal support from the counselors and what support they did receive had more to

do with grammar, spelling and syntax that ideas, idea development, or voice. Roe, Stoodt-Hill

and Burns (2011) explain that students need to know that the process of revising a text "is not

just editing for spelling, grammar, and punctuation. It involves reorganizing the material,

clarifying ideas, and adding and deleting information as needed" (p. 275). But the feedback that

Mr. Franklin and Thuppy gave students was limited to issues such as subject-verb agreement and

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[36] This course is examined in depth in the following chapter.

spelling. It failed to take into account what Warren (2013) has described as the "rhetorical situation of college essays" (p. 54).

One student, Natalia Gomez, wrote an admission essay about leadership and submitted it to Mr. Franklin for his comments. The prompt went as follows: *Tell us about an experience you have had when others looked up to you as a leader. How will your leadership ability impact the life you hope to lead?* In the essay the writer recounts an experience in a hospital during which she provides emotional support to a young girl who is worried about an imminent surgical procedure. She ends the essay by writing, "This young girl showed me that by me becoming a doctor is not only achieving my dreams but its helping people all around the world. This girl showed me that with patience, I can help everyone around me and help myself in situation like this." Mr. Franklin made one comment and marked five errors in the essay, but he did not address the "rhetorical situation." He did not discuss Natalia's voice, the structure of the essay or whether or not Natalia adequately addressed the theme of "leadership ability." His comments were limited to matters of verb tense and spelling.

Colleges do not reveal what they are looking for in an admission essay, nor do they reveal what criteria will be used to evaluate the essay (Paley, 1996; Vidali, 2007). In fact, many essay prompts are misleading. As Warren (2013) writes, "[m]ost prompts ask applicants for personal narratives, but the essays actually function as arguments that make a case for the applicant's potential as a college student" (p. 44). If students require writing instruction and editorial feedback under normal circumstances, the college essay is an assignment in which students are particularly in need.

At Genevieve Brooks High School the counseling staff made it a point to introduce all members of the senior class to college-going texts. They also helped many of these students

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interpret these texts. When it came to supporting students through the composition of college-going texts, however, Mr. Franklin, Thuppy and other staff at the school only provided sporadic help and what help they did offer was limited to surface-level matters such as grammar, spelling and verb tense.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have recast a job that is frequently associated with social work by suggesting that college counselors be thought of as college literacy sponsors. As Brandt (2001) shows, literacy sponsors perform a number of roles and are motivated by a variety of factors. In chapter 3 of this dissertation I described the Discourse of Genevieve Brooks High School as one that privileged college-going above other postsecondary pursuits. In this chapter I have shown how Mr. Franklin and Thuppy worked within this overarching Discourse. While both men hoped that most of their students would pursue either a 2- or 4-year college, they also evinced an open-minded, student-centered approach to college counseling. This approach I labeled discursive openness. Students appreciated this approach and, although it opened up the possibility of forgoing college, it did not result in a low college application rate. Indeed, over 90% of the senior class applied to a college and 100% of my participants did. The Discourse of the counselors (what they said, how they said it, how they acted, how they treated the students) seemed to truly help students with important parts of the college choice process such as seeking out colleges and submitting applications.

However, I have also identified areas of the college choice process where counselors might have offered more support than they did. These areas included the interpretation and composition of college-going texts. Because many college-going texts are complex and opaque,

students need support with textual interpretation. Indeed, college-going texts are some of the first "bureaucratic" texts (Taylor, 1996) that many young men and women are forced to reckon with. College counselors are the school-based professionals who are among the best positioned to help students interpret these opaque texts, but if they lack the time, do not believe this is their responsibility or are not properly trained, such counselors are unlikely to give students the support they need. By contrast, if we begin to envision college counseling as a type of literacy sponsorship and provide counselors the training and education they need, students stand a greater chance of receiving the textual support they deserve.

Under the standard model of college counseling, a counselor conducts one-on-one sessions with students, typically at their request (Stephan, 2013). This model benefits students if certain conditions are met. First, students must recognize that they are in need of support. Second, students must feel comfortable seeking out support. Third, students must have the free time during the school day during which they are permitted to seek out a counselor. Fourth, the counselor must have time to meet individually with all students and address both the socioemotional and textual elements of the college choice process. At low-income schools, these conditions are rarely met. Students are often not aware of the questions they need to ask and when they are aware, they are apprehensive to ask. Students do not typically have "free periods" during which they can pursue a college counselor and even if they did, a counselor would not be able to hold multiple individual meetings with several hundred students over the course of a school year. At GBHS I saw the same seniors again and again coming into the college office. Those that came—many of whom were research participants—benefitted from meeting with Thuppy and Mr. Franklin. However, many seniors did not have either the time or inclination to seek out counseling staff on their own time. Fortunately, there was another structure in place to

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meet the college-going needs of students. In the following chapter I address this structure—a

college, career and life readiness class that was first offered in the spring of 2011.

CHAPTER 6

COLLEGE PREPARATION AND CAREER/LIFE READINESS 101

A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

We cherry picked, I guess.
—Miguel Sanchez, Genevieve Brooks High School Teacher and Scheduler

Qualitative researchers use a wide variety of strategies when conducting analysis. Some hew closely to existing theory while others seek to use their observations and findings to build theory. As Braun and Clarke (2006) write, some researchers look across an entire data corpus while others prefer to closely examine a single item of data. Further, as Rogers and Mosley Wetzel (2014) demonstrate, a single research project can entail multiple strategies of analysis. In preparing this chapter I reviewed my data corpus. However, my main object of inquiry in this chapter is a particular text, a syllabus used in a course taught at Genevieve Brooks High School. I choose to focus on the syllabus to College Preparation and Career/Life Readiness 101 because in certain respects the document symbolizes the school's overarching approach to college preparedness. The fact that the syllabus exists at all is a testament to the school's commitment to preparing students for college and life after high school. The fact that the school did not or could not offer the course to all students is also revealing (more on this below). While this chapter takes a single syllabus as its starting point I do not limit myself to the text alone. Like other discourse analysts (Fairclough, 2003; Gee, 2005), I situate this syllabus in a broader context and read it alongside other "texts." Thus, to unearth meanings from this syllabus I reviewed my field notes (I observed the College Preparedness class on a weekly basis over the course of a school year) and reread interview transcripts in which my participants discussed the course. Finally, I also read the syllabus in the context of citywide and national initiatives to increase the college-going rates of low-income youth.

The chapter is organized as follows: I begin by examining the text itself.   Because

content and form cannot be pried away from one another (Fairclough, 2003), I attend to both

issues of topical importance (college access, financial literacy, etc.) and linguistic salience (word

choice and grammatical mood). I then examine how the syllabus came to be by exploring the

history of the course. In the following section I describe the authors of the syllabus. I conclude

the chapter by describing two prominent themes: Preparation for Life and Interrogation.

Textual Analysis of the Syllabus

The College Preparation and Career/Life Readiness 101 syllabus has five sections (see

Appendix A for a deidentified reproduction of the syllabus). At the top of the first page is the

heading. Below this is the class "Mission Statement." The syllabus then lists the seven major

units of the course. Next is the grading policy. Finally, the authors identify five important

aspects of the class: groups, participation, speech, debates and papers.

The syllabus heading includes the name of the school, the address, the names of the

school leaders, the title of the class and the names of the instructors. There is nothing unusual in

finding the name of the course or the names of teachers at the top of a syllabus. By contrast, the

fact that the authors included the name of the school and the school administrators is unusual.

Most high school syllabi do not include the names of the principals and assistant principals. Most

do not include the address. Indeed, most high school classes do not have syllabi at all! Why

include this information? The inclusion of these factors suggests that the authors wished to

"signal" (Kirst & Venezia, 2004) institutional alignment and a degree of gravitas. Kirst and

Venezia (2004) note that school-based policy and broader institutional arrangements

communicate or "signal" meaning and expectations to students, and these signals have an

influence on postsecondary outcomes. The same holds true for syllabi. This document, which comes with the explicit imprimatur of the school leadership, suggests that the class is particularly important.

The next question to ask then is: why is the class important? What will this class offer? The words of the course title suggest an answer—and a counterideology. The most influential educational document of the moment—the Common Core State Standards—declares that today's schools must prepare students to be both "college and career ready" (CCSSI, 2010). If high schools aren't preparing (or perceived to be preparing) their students for college they face the real threat of closure. For this reason, many high schools are swallowing the Common Core discourse whole. The title of this course, however, suggests that the educators at this school want something more for their students. This class isn't called "College and Career Readiness 101." It is "College Preparation and Career/Life Readiness 101."

The word that is most conspicuous in the course title is *life.* The authors might have only used the preferred verbiage of the day, but they did not. Including the word *life* suggests that for the authors of the document, high school is not just about preparing students for college and career—as the Common Core authors would have us believe. In fact, inserting the word *life* interrupts the more common "collocation" (Fairclough, 2003) of college and career. Class-based observations suggest that their use of the word *life* was more than mere rhetoric. On many occasions the teachers covered topics—like cyber bullying and personal finance—that have relevance beyond the context of college and the workplace. Once a week the teachers also passed around a basket and encouraged students to submit anonymous questions, on folded-up pieces of paper. The students could ask questions about anything under the sun and one or more of the teachers would provide an answer. Teachers also invited outside speakers to come and talk

to the class on a variety of subjects. On one day, for example, two speakers led a session on healthy living. On this day, the speakers did not try to make a link between healthy living and college and career. For these speakers, and the teachers of the class, healthy living was an end in-of-itself.

A second conspicuous word that we find in the title is *101*. The use of this number has a clear meaning to individuals who have knowledge of collegiate course titles; 101 connotes introductory course. By using this word in the title, the teachers seem to be suggesting that *this* course is itself a college course. Interestingly, the teachers did not (during any of my observations) draw attention to the word *101* or explain its significance to students. This omission prompts the question: who is the intended audience of this class title? Did the teachers assume—I would argue incorrectly—that students know the connotation of *101*—or were they instead trying to signal a different audience? One possibility is that the authors of the document were trying to signal "rigor" to the principal or other school-based or district-wide administrators. There are reasons to doubt this interpretation as I did at first. The principal had a hand in creating the document and visiting supervisors and DOE administrators do not generally review class documents. And yet, as I show below, evidence elsewhere in this syllabus suggests that the teachers were in fact writing this syllabus to adults as well as their students. The second section of the syllabus is the Mission Statement, which reads as follows:

> In a world in which knowledge is changing rapidly and technology is providing access to vast amounts of information, our mission is to hone students' critical-thinking skills and familiarize students with key concepts that they can apply to new situations. Our mission for this course is to provide an opportunity to explore the characteristics, skills, and

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knowledge that students will need to survive and thrive in terms of life satisfaction in college and the years ahead.

The inclusion of a mission statement suggests, once again, that this class is unlike typical high school courses. While most syllabi begin with a brief overview of the course, this syllabus begins with a mission. The use of the word *mission*—with its religious associations—suggests that what will happen in this class is of deep import. Indeed, this class is not simply about learning; it purports to be about surviving and thriving. This class is not just a mandatory course, but an "opportunity." Beginning with a mission statement strikes a particular tone: earnest, hopeful, almost inspirational.

If the tone of this section of the syllabus is worth comment so too is the section's orientation. By orientation, I mean: to whom is the section oriented? Who is the intended audience? Elsewhere in the syllabus the authors address the students (e.g., "You will work on daily activities"). Here, however, the students are spoken of in the third person. They are not spoken to, but spoken about. This confirms the supposition above that the intended audiences of this document are adult administrators as well as the students.

The missionary tone of section two shifts in the third section of the syllabus. In this rather staid section the authors list the seven units that will be covered in the class.

1. Self-Evaluation and Understanding
2. Career Paths
3. College Literacy
4. Personal Finance Before, During and After College
5. Internet Literacy
6. Vice and Virtue of College Life
7. The Art of Public Speaking (ongoing)

If the intent of the second section was to engage and excite the students, the purpose here is more informational: this—the syllabus seems to be saying—is what we will be doing in this

course. While the tone of this section does not seem to align with the tone in section two, the content does appear to reflect the broad approach to life preparation we see in the course title. Units 2, 3, 4 and 6 deal explicitly with college and/or career. These units cover the broad landscape of colleges and careers in the United States. In fact, they cover just the type of information that most low-income students are typically denied (Bergerson, 2009; Tierney & Venegas, 2009). Exposing students to a wide variety of occupations is of crucial importance. Similarly, the authors of the syllabus are to be commended for covering topics such as the college essay, resumes, the college application process and FAFSA. And yet, the document does not stop there. Three of the seven topics are not limited to college or career. By including topics such as internet literacy and personal finance, the authors of the document make true on the promise issued in their title. The units in this course syllabus do indeed cover college, career *and* life writ large.

What is most notable in section three of the syllabus is the authors' shift in grammatical mood. Elsewhere in the syllabus the authors primarily write in the declarative mood (e.g., "This exercise is essential for acquiring team-working skills") and imperative mood [e.g., "You will have to give a *demonstrative, persuasive, and informative speech*" (emphasis in original).] In this section, by contrast, the interrogative mood predominates. Under each of the seven topics noted on the previous page (Self-Evaluation and Understanding, Career Paths, Internet Literacy, etc.) the authors included questions (See Appendix A). For example, under *Self-Evaluation* the authors write: "Who am I? … How does the past affect the future? … What do I need to change?... Below *Career Paths,* the authors ask: What is an ideal career?...How can careers be evaluated on financial and emotional levels? …Why do people change careers? These questions,

as I note in the final section of this chapter, bespeak a wide-ranging, student-centered, inquiry-based approach to college and life readiness.

In the final two sections of the syllabus the authors cover the grading policy and five important factors to the course. What is most notable in these sections is how students will be assessed. Students will not have to take tests. There will only be two quizzses. They will be graded on their performance in four areas: participation, speech presentations, debates, and projects. Assessments will be based upon what they know and what they do.

While the grading policy is clear, the final section of the syllabus is less so. This section appears to be a list of five factors that will play a central role in the course, but there is no heading to guide the reader. The five sections are as follows: Groups, Participation, Speech, Debates, and Papers. Three of these terms (participation, speech and debates) appear in the above section. Two do not—groups and papers. In any event, each topic is expanded upon in brief 1-3 sentence descriptions. For example, below the word *Groups*, the authors write that students will be assigned to a "permanent group" that will work on "daily activities, 'global citizens' presentations and major group projects." Below *Debates*, it reads "learning to be tactful, understanding and appreciative of those differences that reside [in] you and another will aid this growing society, thus we debate."

This final section reinforces the theme of student-as-enactor of knowledge that we see throughout the syllabus. Students create group presentations, deliver speeches, engage in debates and write papers. This section makes clear that the syllabus will require a great deal of students. Observations of the class confirmed this.

Genesis of the Course

The history of the College Preparation and Career/Life Readiness 101 syllabus begins with the creation of the class the syllabus was meant to guide. Because a class that is devoted to preparing students for postsecondary life is so rare in high schools I spent a good amount of time trying to discover how the class came to be. I asked the teachers of the class about this but was not entirely satisfied with their answers. Either they were not sure or they were not comfortable telling me. I could not tell. Finally I took my question to the principal, Yelena Holub. Her answer surprised me:

> The whole reason why the college skills process [College Preparation and Career/Life Readiness 101] was even created, and I'm embarrassed to even admit it, was in the spring of 2011, when we had 27 seniors, we literally had nothing to give them third period. It was like two days before the beginning of the semester. It was a major gap in their program, their lunch was at the end of the day, so I said, "Okay, let's give them college skills." By this time, the students already applied for college. Students already, what we did, we put them all in, me and Harold Franklin taught the class, it was tons of fun. We talked about everything about when you get to college: how to create a budget, how not to fall into credit card debt.

The educational historian William Reese (2007) has written that what is taught in schools is guided by political and economic values. No doubt this is true. And yet, as this passage shows, what students are taught is also the result of unpredictable events. Sometimes classes are created for practical, programmatic reasons. There were 27 seniors who needed to be somewhere third period. They needed a class. Why not a "college skills" class? Of course, it was ideology that

ultimately led them to offer what the students referred to as College Prep (as opposed to art or dance or computer science), but it's worth emphasizing that ideology dictated what to teach, not that students desperately needed such a class.

GBHS piloted the class in the spring of 2011 and because Ms. Holub thought the class was successful they continued it the following academic year. That fall, however, she encountered some problems she hadn't foreseen. The class began well. There was a small class of 15 seniors, but as the months went by Ms. Holub came to feel that providing college information and support to students during their senior year was too late.

> *Ms. Holub*: Even though it [the class] helped Mr. Franklin in terms of the college application process—because we did a lot of stuff during class that they [ordinarily] do after school with him—but it's too late for them to improve their, to take a different SAT or to improve their average.
>
> *Jeremy*: Or to work on their essay.
>
> *Ms. Holub*: Or work on their essay. So it's kind of like, even though they did write essays in class and it was right on time, but it wasn't that productive for them. I mean, it was more, if you would do that, then you can, but now you can only do this. So spring semester, 2012, we decided to give it to juniors.

Thus, during the 2012-2013 school year (the year of the study), College Preparation and Career/Life Readiness 101 was offered to juniors, once in the fall, and again in the spring.

Authors of the Syllabus

Four people were involved with the creation of the syllabus for College Preparation and Career/Life Readiness 101: Yelena Holub, Harold Franklin, Thuppy Elders and Miguel Sanchez.

Why so many authors? The unusual number of authors followed the logic of the time and place. Ms. Holub was not only the principal of the school, she also taught classes occasionally and was actively involved in creating curricula. It was she who created the first draft of the syllabus, and taught the class, along with Mr. Franklin. During the 2012-2013 school year (the year of the study), Ms. Holub wanted Harold Franklin and Thuppy Elders to teach the class, as they were the most qualified in terms of content knowledge. However, these men were not certified teachers. They had the knowledge, the interest and the relationships with students but because they were not certified they were not permitted—by the State of New York—to teach without a certified teacher in the room. Ms. Holub needed an extra body. This body came in the form of Miguel Sanchez, a certified social studies teacher with 15 years of teaching experience. And so, the 16-18 students who took College Prep each semester had the privilege of three teachers (and the syllabus therefore had 4 authors). In practice Mr. Franklin and Thuppy did most of the preparation, teaching and assessing. It was Mr. Franklin and Thuppy who were most involved in adapting Ms. Holub's syllabus. Mr. Sanchez was primarily there for compliance purposes. However, he did engage the students, read their essays and provide feedback. He also made a point of sharing his own experiences with students in the hopes that they might benefit from it. A native New Yorker, Mr. Sanchez grew up living in public housing in Brooklyn and was the first in his family to attend college.

The Students

For whom was this syllabus intended? Earlier in this chapter I wrote that College Preparation and Career/Life Readiness 101 was offered to eleventh grade students. What I did not say was that only a small number of juniors (about 35 of 150) were provided access to the class. The students in College Prep (as most students called the class) were representative of the

broader junior class in terms of their cultural background. Like their classmates, they were primarily Dominican, African American, West African and Jamaican. In terms of their academic achievement, however, they were atypical. As Mr. Sanchez explained, "We recruited 20 to 30 kids to take the course [each semester], and we cherry picked, I guess, the best kids from the junior class to do it." Mr. Sanchez, who was also responsible for scheduling at the school, was quick to add that he would like to offer the class to more juniors but there were conflicts.

> It depends on the junior, if the junior is definitely on track and has taken all of his previous courses and passed his courses, yes, but if the junior is off track and has failed one or two courses in the past, they have to make that course up and if they have to make that course up and that course is being offered during the time that the college prep course is offered, then they might not take advantage of it, they may not be able to take advantage of it. . . . And that's what happened to us in the fall and the spring. A lot of the juniors are eleventh graders but, you know, they're like barely eleventh graders, in other words, they are juniors who barely made it through sophomore year… because they had failed courses when they were ninth graders, that kind of took away their opportunity to take the course in college prep.

According to Mr. Sanchez, the students themselves forfeited their opportunity to take College Preparation and Career/Life Readiness 101 by failing one or more classes. This is an interesting assignment of responsibility. Certainly the students bear some responsibility. During the year of my study I observed many teachers staying late after school to offer students extra help—and I also observed some students not working as hard as they could have and not staying after school for tutoring. However, it is worth noting that responsibility also lies elsewhere. State and school policy effectively guided some students into the class and herded others away.

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Preparation for Life

The syllabus for College Preparation and Career/Life Readiness 101 suggests that

educators at Genevieve Brooks High School were committed to preparing their students for life

after high school. Further, the syllabus suggests that, from the school perspective, success after

high school involves college, but not college alone.[37] The syllabus includes some of the key

components of college readiness such as academic skill-building, knowledge about college

applications, and knowledge about financial aid (Arnold, Lu, & Armstrong, 2012; Conley, 2010).

However, the authors did not stop there. In crafting the syllabus, they reflected upon the

successes and stumbles of students they had taught in previous years. What could be learned

from students who were accepted into a school's highly competitive HEOP program? What

could be learned from students who opted to stay home and pursue a 2-year degree? What could

be learned from students who "stopped out" of college after one semester?

Educators at GBHS, like educators elsewhere in New York State and the nation, struggle

to find time during the school day to address students' socioemotional needs. The transition

from high school to college involves so much more than content knowledge. And yet, because

content knowledge is what is tested by the state, content drives the curriculum. The fact that

GBHS provides students the opportunity to examine their own selves speaks well of the school.

In this class, teachers didn't just teach to students' brains, but to their situated selves. It is also

notable that the syllabus included a unit on "career paths." Many teenagers develop career

aspirations before educational aspirations. Allowing students to explore careers of interest opens

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[37] I want to emphasize that the authors of the syllabus expect all of their students *in this class* to go to college. Do they expect all students at GBHS go to college? It depends who you ask and in what context. Publically, the answer is yes. Privately, this is not the case. Both the principal and the college counselor were emphatic that they did not expect all of their students to go to college.

up the world of work to them and may end up revealing to students that their dream job requires some postsecondary training.

Students also benefit when they are exposed to knowledge and skills related to personal finance (Vitt et al., 2000). The inclusion, therefore, of a unit on personal finance demonstrates the school's commitment to supporting students' postsecondary lives. The unit, which is titled "Personal Finance Before, During and After College," includes lessons on financial aid and the FAFSA—lessons that are critical to preparing working class youth for the college choice process. The unit also includes lesson on topics such as budgets and debt—topics that can potentially benefit all students, regardless of their postsecondary path. Evidence from this study suggests that the unit was not as strong as it might have been (see chapter 7 for an extended analysis of college finance literacy). Nonetheless, the inclusion of this unit supports the overall conclusion that the authors of this document sought to create a course that would provide students a well-rounded, broad preparation for life after high school. As the title of the course indicates, the authors of the document sought to prepare students for college, career *and life*.

The authors of the syllabus do not explicitly explain what it means to prepare a student for life. After all, how does one prepare students for something—living—that they are already engaging in? Aren't going to college and having a career part of life? What makes life distinct from college and career? These questions are not fully addressed. However, by addressing topics that were only tangentially related to college and career, and that were relevant to the lives of their students, the authors suggest an answer.

Interrogation

Discourse analysis reminds us that what matters in society is not just what is said but how it is said. Indeed, how something is phrased colors the very meaning of what is said. Fairclough (2003) writes that the meaning of a text can often be inferred by attending to the predominant grammatical mood. Here the predominant grammatical mood is interrogation, but what does this mean?

Many schools make the mistake of thinking that preparing students for the college choice process involves cramming them full of information. Tell them about the FAFSA. Tell them that there is a difference between public universities and private colleges. And so on. Evidence from learning theory (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Lave & Wenger, 1991) suggests that students are less likely to gain knowledge when they are put in the position of passive learner. Instead, students are more likely to learn when they have an active hand in engaging with and constructing knowledge. While a great deal of information was covered in College Prep, the instructors/authors engaged in an inquiry-based approach to teaching and learning. They engaged their students in dialogue and in so doing apprenticed them into a discourse style used in many college-based seminars. This approach to teaching and learning is evident in the *twenty-six* questions that are posed in the syllabus. Some of these questions are facile (e.g., Why is the timely completion of [the] college application process the recipe for success?). Others (e.g., "What is an ideal career?" and "How does the present affect the future?") prompted students to think seriously about their current situation as well as what they wanted to pursue after completing high school.

The technique of using questions in a syllabus reminds us that a syllabus is much more than a listing of what will be covered in a given course. It also suggests *how* a teacher (or

teachers) will present material and engage students over the course of a semester. Perhaps most importantly, the use of interrogation here points to another way of conceiving of the college choice process. Preparing for college and life after high school need not involve imparting particular nuggets of information. It can also, and perhaps should, involve providing space for students to think about what they want out of life and how they will go about pursuing their goals.

Conclusion

This discourse analysis began with a single document, a 3-½ page course syllabus. I believed that by analyzing this document I could learn something important about how educators at GBHS go about supporting the college choice process and how students at GBHS gain the knowledge, skills and attitudes associated with the college choice process. However, I was also mindful that a syllabus can only tell you so much. For example, in 2013, when the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) conducted an analysis of schools of education solely by reviewing course syllabi and other published documents it was roundly criticized for adopting a methodological approach that prevented it from accurately gauging the quality of the programs it had set out to study (Darling-Hammond, 2013). In an attempt to avoid the shortcomings of the NCTQ study I drew upon other data sources. In addition to reading the syllabus, I observed College Preparation and Career/Life Readiness 101 over the course of an entire school year. I interviewed the syllabus authors. I spoke to students in the class. I also interviewed students who had taken the class the previous year. Of the 14 participants in my study, 7 were offered the class during their junior year. Each of the participants told me that they learned important things in the class. For example, Liz Lopez talked about the value of watching videos about high school seniors going through the college choice process. As Liz explained, "It was cool to

actually see people get scholarships and get grants…how they go about it." While Liz discussed the elements about the class that were related to the college application process, Yessica Rodriguez spoke of these elements and the skills she learned that she thought would help her once she arrived at college:

> Mr. Franklin, Thuppy, Mr. Rodriguez, they taught us how to do debates, because in college they do that, speeches, everybody in the class, personally I don't like those because I don't like speaking in front of a lot of students, but it's a good experience. We did college essays. We did like three of them, which really helped us. Because [otherwise] right at this moment, we still would have been struggling with these deadlines for college application.

College Prep, as the syllabus suggests and the students confirmed, played an important process in preparing students for life after high school. Of course all students did not benefit from taking the class. As Miguel Sanchez, the College Prep teacher who also did scheduling at the school, noted, the administration "cherry picked" the "best" students in the junior class to take College Prep. Those students who had passed all their classes with high grades and had passed all their Regents examinations were scheduled to take the class in either the fall or spring of their junior year. The other students, approximately 75%-80% of the class, were not offered the class. Among my participants, 7 students did not take the class. Vivian, Fernando, Abdul, Krystal, Michael, Nabella and Allen—none of these students had the benefit of beginning the college choice process during their junior year. Some of these students were able to take advantage of other college preparatory experiences the school offered. For example, Fernando enrolled in a college class that he learned about from a GBHS teacher. This class familiarized him with how to register for classes and provided him an opportunity to spend time on a college campus.

Others were not as lucky. Nabella, for example, entered senior year not knowing that the college

application process was wholly different from the high school application process. And Allen

entered senior year wholly unaware of how students finance college.

A strictly textual analysis of the College Prep syllabus would not point to these findings.

Merely looking at the syllabus would not tell us who took the class (and who was excluded),

what students learned, or how it affected their college choice process. A discourse analysis,

which sets texts in the context of other factors, can.

CHAPTER 7

COLLEGE FINANCE LITERACY

I'm poor. I can prove that I'm poor but dagnamit it's frustrating. Do they have to make it so hard?
—Ayame Kurosaki, Genevieve Brooks High School Class President

Every year high school seniors across the country like 17-year old Ayame Kurosaki

participate in the highly fraught, protracted and opaque practice of applying for financial aid.

Not all college aspirants participate in this process. In fact, some students from wealthy

households forego the process because they believe doing so will make them more desirable

applicants. During a time in which universities are receiving less and less public support, a

student who can pay the full cost of tuition is a desirable applicant indeed. For students from

low-income households, however, the financial aid process is a necessary and critical component

of the college application process. If these students cannot figure out how to access some

combination of grants, loans or work-study (or do not know such funding sources exist) they will

not find themselves joining the approximately 2.1 million students who manage to transition

from high school to college every year (NCES, 2014).   In recent decades, the cost of college has

risen considerably and the share borne by state and local government has declined. As a result,

greater numbers of students—and in particular low-income students—have become ever more

reliant on financial aid.

The financial aid process is patently a literacy practice. It involves a number of texts like

tax returns, the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) and financial aid award

letters. It involves literacy events (Heath, 1983), moments during which students sit down with a

college finance text and fill it out, talk about it with an adult or peer, or just mull it over

independently. The financial aid process also involves literacy sponsors and operates within an

ideological frame that is not always apparent. Nonetheless, this process is not typically thought of as a literacy practice. What happens if we apply theories of literacy as a social practice to the financial aid process? Will it open up vistas? Will it permit us to see the financial aid process in a way it has not erstwhile been considered? The analysis that follows suggests that the answer to these questions is *yes*. For students at Genevieve Brooks High School the college application and enrollment process was in many ways a financial experience. It involved thinking about money in new, and sometimes uncomfortable, ways. It involved learning—down to the penny— how much their parents earned or did not earn and how these earnings were interpreted by the United States Department of Education. As Howard Franklin explained, "Yeah, I would say 99% of it [the college choice process] is about money." Mr. Franklin went on to explain that in individual and group meetings with students the vast majority of students' questions and challenges related to paying for college. Observations, interviews, focus groups and a number of informal conversations held over the course of the school year confirmed this impression. In fact, it was student interest and experience, rather than pre-established questions, which led me in the direction of this chapter. When I began this project in the fall of 2012 I had no inclination that I would come to see the financial aid process as the spindle around which the college choice process turned. Nor did I anticipate how central literacy would be to this process. And yet, over the course of this project I have come to see college finance as one of the key literacies that characterizes the college choice process and the high school-to-college transition.

Background to College Finance

Financial aid is made available to students and their families through a decentralized network of grants, loans, work-study, tax credits and deductions. Although financial aid is

provided by a number of sources including state governments, universities and private

organizations, the largest share of financial aid ($164.5 billion of $248.3 billion in 2013-2014) is

provided by the federal government (College Board, 2014). While financial aid can be traced

back to at least 1944, the year Congress passed the Servicemen's Readjustment Act (popularly

known as the GI Bill), the modern financial aid system is best understood as a legacy of the

Higher Education Act of 1965 (St. John, 2003). Passed as one of the Johnson Administration's

Great Society programs, the HEA provided college grants and loans to low-income Americans.

During the 1960s and 1970s public expenditure for higher education grew. However, "since the

mid-1980s," McPherson and Schapiro (2002) write, "this trend has reversed. As the share of

college costs financed by the federal and state governments has fallen, the share borne by

families has inevitably increased" (pp. 73-74). Over the past fifteen years, as the cost of

attending college has increased and median family income has decreased, students and their

families have had to pay more and more for higher education. Regrettably, these "regressive"

social policies have continued to the present day (Mortenson, 2014).[38] As Mortenson (2014)

writes, "in 1980 students and their families provided 30.0 per cent of the revenues of Higher

Education. By 2011 this had risen to 50.2 per cent" (p. 27).

College Finance and College Finance Perceptions

The cost of college and the availability of aid matters a great deal. Increases in tuition

have been associated with decreases in in college enrollment (Heller, 2005). This is especially

true for low-income students, African Americans and Latinas/os, all of whom who are especially

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[38] In January of 2015 President Barack Obama unveiled "America's College Promise," an ambitious plan to provide two years of free community college to students who maintain a 2.5 GPA, make progress toward a degree and attend at least half-time. Many college access advocates heralded the plan, but it is unclear whether or not the Republican-controlled Congress will take up this proposed legislation.

price sensitive (Heller, 2005). On the other hand, grants promote college-going. When more grants are made available, more students pursue college (St. John, 2003). The same may hold true for loans though the research findings here are less clear. Avery and Hoxby (2004) found that loan eligibility increases college access, while Heller's (2008) review of the literature led him to conclude that loans have only a minimal effect on college participation.

If it is true that the cost of college and the availability of loans contribute to college-going it is also true that *knowledge of* or *perceptions regarding* college finance also contributes to college-going. And yet, there are relatively few studies that seek to examine how students perceive the world of college finance. Mundel and Coles (2004) have written that students' perceptions regarding college finance may be just as important as the policies themselves. And yet, we don't know much about the college finance perceptions of students other than the following:

(1) Many of the steps that lead to college matriculation (e.g., predisposition, high school course selection, test taking, college search, college choice) are influenced by students' knowledge or perception of college costs and financial aid (Fitzgerald and Delaney, 2002; Perna, 2006);

(2) Most students—whether they attend a low-resource, middle-resource or high-resource high school—have incomplete or inaccurate information related to college cost and financing (Perna & Steele, 2011); and

(3) Students from low-SES families tend to underestimate the amount of financial aid available and overestimate the cost of college (Kirst & Venezia, 2002).

According to Mundel and Coles (2004), more research is needed to uncover how students develop college finance perceptions. In this chapter I do just that. I begin by examining how

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students first developed perceptions around college finance. I then show how over time these perceptions calcified into what I call college finance literacy. I then identify three challenges that students faced.

Initial Perceptions Regarding College Finance

Students' initial perceptions regarding finance were incomplete and, in some instances, inaccurate. For example, students entered high school knowing college was expensive, but they had no idea how expensive. Students with older siblings or parents who had enrolled in college knew that financial aid was available, though they did not know how to access this aid. Other students, like Michael who, by the time he had completed his sophomore year in high school, had gone further in school than any member of his family, entered high school without any idea of how or if college could be afforded. This was not a terribly surprising finding, given what research tells us about what low-income students tend to know and believe about college finance. What was surprising was how little students' perceptions regarding college finance changed between the ninth and eleventh grade. Each student in the study believed that Genevieve Brooks High School had a strong college-going culture and provided them with multiple opportunities to learn about college and the college admission process, but college finance was not something the school taught about until senior year. According to students in the study, the topic was rarely, if ever, addressed, before twelfth grade.[39] As a result, students' initial perceptions regarding college finance remained virtually unchanged during students first three years in high school.

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[39] There was one exception to this trend. As I write in chapter 6, GBHS offers a College Prep class to approximately 20-25% of its students during their junior year. Students in this class are explicitly taught about the financial aid process. As a result, these students have a marked advantage over students who do not take the course.

Most students reported that they first developed perceptions around college finance from family and friends. For example, Ayame, the senior class president, reported that she first learned about the cost of college when her sister went to a nearby community college. Neither of her parents (both of whom were born in the Dominican Republic and emigrated to the United States as adolescents) had attended college and neither parent had a high paying job. Still, her sister managed to get to—*and through*—college. Ayame explained, "it kind of made me see that college is obtainable, even if it is expensive." Ayame's financial knowledge was vague but her experiences nonetheless highlight the importance of family networks. Had it not been for her older sister, Ayame might not have realized that college is "obtainable," even for students from modest backgrounds.

Abdul also first learned about the cost of college and the availability of financial aid from an older sister. Like some of the young Latino male undergraduates that Carrión (2014) discusses, Abdul and Ayame benefitted from their older siblings' cultural capital. Abdul and Ayame's experiences contrasted sharply with that of their classmate Michael, a first-generation-to-college student. Michael's older sister and mother encouraged him to attend college but when it came to support, the best they could offer were words of encouragement. Michael's sister told him, "You gotta get as many scholarships as you can to go to college," but she did not know how to access these scholarships. She also may not have been aware that scholarships (i.e., grants provided by private foundations or employers) account for only 5% of all undergraduate aid (College Board, 2013a). Students like Michael who do not play sports and whose grades are not exceptional are more likely to fund college through federal and state grants than with private scholarships.

During their first few years of high school most students at GBHS knew that college was expensive but had no understanding of how people found a way to fund college. One exception was Abdul. In an interview, Abdul recalled an 8th grade trip to American University in Washington, DC.

> We went there and she [the principal] was telling us how she had so many loans; she was
> like 30-something. She was like, "I took out so many loans and I'm still paying it off." I
> was like, "Damn!" I didn't want to get stuck, and she was the principal, so I mean, she's
> still paying it off after 10-15 years. She's like, "I pay a little bit of it off every year."

This experience proved to be formative for Abdul. Although he didn't learn how much his principal was paying each month, he was shocked and alarmed that a (presumably well-paid) principal would still be paying off loans well into her thirties. Abdul ended up only applying to public institutions because, as he would later explain to me, "I didn't want to pay all that money just to go to private school."

Between middle school—when most students developed vague notions of college costs— and 11th grade, student perceptions around college finance changed little. In New York State, like elsewhere in the country, students do not *need* to know anything about college finance to earn a high school diploma. They do, however, have to demonstrate academic content knowledge by passing high school exit examinations known as the Regents.[40] As one veteran social studies teacher, Miguel Sanchez, explained to me,

> Whether we go above and beyond to prepare them for life besides the Regents, again it
> depends on the teacher. I know I do parts of that but I also enforce and definitely just
> focus on Regents, Regents, Regents, Regents. We have no choice really, you know, for

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[40] To earn a high school diploma in New York State, students must pass examinations administered by the New York State Board of Regents in five content areas: English, mathematics, science, US history, and global history.

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some of us our jobs are on the line in regards to making sure these kids pass the Regents or not.

There was not—and is not—comparable pressure to provide students with an awareness of college financing systems or knowledge of the financial aid process. As a result, there were few opportunities within academic classes for students to gain such knowledge. Since the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001, classroom teachers across the country have felt pressured to omit content from curricula that will not ultimately be assessed on high stakes standardized examinations (Ravitch, 2010).   It may be that at GBHS even teachers who believe they are qualified to discuss college financing choose not to and instead focus on other higher stakes content because their "jobs are on the line."

During their sophomore year, 50% (7/14) of the students in this study took a college preparatory and study skills class designed by a national college access organization, AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination). Students spoke highly of this course in general, but they also noted that scant time was spent on paying for college. As Allen explained, "the only thing I remember [regarding college finance in the AVID class] is that we went through this giant book, but I don't think we went into depth about paying for college; it [the class] was mostly about going to college, doing college work, prepping us." Royal, a student who took the AVID class with Allen, agreed that little time was spent discussing college finance, and the time that was devoted to college costs was solely devoted to the costs of private institutions. Royal recalled that the teacher never once mentioned any of New York's public institutions of higher education. What Royal "learned" in his 10th grade AVID class was that colleges charge about

$20,000 or $40,000 a year.[41] This led Royal to believe that only a fool would spend that kind of money—particularly when the military was an option. Royal avoided going to college because he believed he couldn't afford it. He was not aware that there was a public university two miles from his apartment that cost $2,500 per semester. He hoped to go to the Air Force, and would have had it not been for immigration-related complications. The fall following his senior year Royal attended neither college nor the military. It would take one more semester, as I note in the afterword, for Royal to make his way to college.

<div align="center">

Acquiring College Finance Literacy

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College finance literacy refers to *the ability to read, write, communicate about and critically appraise the financial texts that mediate college attendance*. College finance literacy is not a dichotomous variable that a student either has or lacks. Rather, it is best understood as a spectrum. On one end of this spectrum one would expect to find a student who has a deep understanding of college finance, who questions received wisdom about college finance and who can acquire all the aid/funding available to someone in her position. On the opposite end of the spectrum would be a student who is misinformed about college costs and financial aid and/or cannot read the texts that mediate college admission.

Most students at GBHS began to acquire college finance literacy midway through their senior year. During their first three years of high school, students at GBHS had only sporadic access to college finance-related documents (e.g., articles about college loans, scholarship applications, handouts explaining the difference between a grant and a loan, etc.). By the beginning of their senior year students understood that the costs of institutions varied

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[41] In fact, tuition is far more affordable on average. In 2011-2012 the average price for in-state tuition and fees for full time students in New York State was $6,213, below the national average of $8,294 (Ma & Baum, 2012).

significantly and that financing existed to help students pay for college, but they did not know how to access this aid. Nor did students have a nuanced understanding of how aid is made available, for whom the aid is made available and the implications of availing oneself of financial aid. This changed in January, the month during which the FAFSA is posted online every year by the US Department of Education. GBHS staff talked to students sporadically about aid during the first semester of school, but it was not until January of 2013 that Mr. Franklin held an afterschool event for parents and began scheduling one-on-one FAFSA conferences with students. Mr. Franklin's discussions with students and their families prompted some students to complete their FAFSA immediately. Others waited until later in the year to begin the FAFSA. Those who put off completing the FAFSA were not able to speak face-to-face with their college counselor, but most of these students still found a way to complete the forms. These students engaged in digital literacy practices such as texting and Facebook messaging to communicate with a college coach the school hired for the summer. Students were able to use their digital literacy practices to support the "bureaucratic literacy practice" (Bartlett, Jayaram, & Bonhomme, 2011) of applying for federal aid.

Data from this study shows that while most students acquired the ability to read, write and communicate about college finance texts, few of the students got to the point at which they could critically appraise financial texts and form opinions regarding the ideologies inherent in them. They did not practice, in other words, what scholars have come to refer to as "critical literacy" (Luke, 2000; Morrell, 2008). What literacy they did acquire was achieved by communicating with trusted "literacy sponsors" (Brandt, 1998, 2001) such as Mr. Franklin (the college counselor), Thuppy (the community associate), and Sally (the recently-hired college coach). Brandt explains that one's access to a particular literacy is typically mediated by one's

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access to individuals with said literacy. Certainly, that was the case here. More than anything else, students explained their acquisition of college finance literacy as an outgrowth of conversations with trusted advisors. Several months after graduating from high school, Royal Knight had a vivid memory of completing the FAFSA with one such advisor, Mr. Franklin:

> Last year I filled it [FAFSA] out January 13th. I did it in Mr. Franklin's office. He set up an appointment list for that week. Everyone had an appointment for one hour alone with him. He walked us through the process pretty easily. He also explained to us how to do it for [the following year] when we'd be alone. This year it was pretty easy, about 25 minutes. He told me that if you don't understand something there is usually a question mark beside it that explains it to you.

In this passage two important themes are worth elaborating. First, Mr. Franklin was able to devote an entire hour to each student. At most urban high schools where student-to-counselor ratios can be several hundred or even a thousand to one, such individual attention would be nearly impossible. AT GBHS, such conferences were possible because of a relationship with an organization (College Entry), which helped fund Mr. Franklin's position. Second, Royal explains that Mr. Franklin didn't simply do the FAFSA for him. Rather, Mr. Franklin helped Royal complete the form, thereby developing Royal's college financing literacy. The second time Royal had to fill out the FAFSA he was alone and because of Mr. Franklin's earlier tutelage he was able to complete the application in "about 25 minutes" and the TAP (New York State's Tuition Assistance Program) in "about 7 minutes."

Adbul also drew attention to individuals who supported him with the financial aid process. Because of the support he received, completing the FAFSA was not overly onerous—though he did understand how the process would be for others.

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I don't think I had that much trouble [filling out the FAFSA] because when I was at

school, I had Mr. Franklin and when I went home, I had my older sister who already done

it a couple of times before. So she already knew how to do everything.

In this quotation, Abdul draws attention to two individuals who supported the development of his

college finance literacy: his sister (who was a student at a four-year college at the time) and his

college counselor (a literacy sponsor with a BA and an MBA). Like Royal and Abdul, most

participants in this study described Mr. Franklin as extremely supportive. In large part because

of the work of Mr. Franklin, most of the 14 student participants in this study successfully

completed the FAFSA and publically available data suggest a school-wide trend.

Educators at GBHS also made concerted efforts to support students' college finance

literacy by organizing events like those described in chapter 4. Ayame attended each of these

events but it was an event held in the fall of her senior year that had a lasting impact on her.

It was this year, it was in September and we all had to come and sit through this three

hour meeting, you know, financial opportunities for college, going away, FAFSA form,

and all this other stuff that was really informative…A lot of parents came actually. It was

surprising, I didn't think a lot of people would come but they did. They filled out all of

these forms, and deadlines. It was really cool.

Here Ayame describes an after-school parent event in which staff at GBHS exposed students and

their parents to college finance documents, and helped them engage the texts. Rather than

simply showing a PowerPoint or telling the parents about the forms, Mr. Franklin provided

enough copies of the forms so that the parents could fill them out right on the spot.

<center>**College Finance Challenges**</center>

Despite efforts by students at GBHS and their literacy sponsors, students nonetheless encountered difficulty navigating the financial aid process and deciphering college finance texts. In this section I explore three factors that impeded the development of students' college finance literacy and hampered their ability to make a smooth transition from high school to college.

The sequence of the financial aid process

The financial aid process is unmistakably sequential but when it begins and when it ends is unclear. This process is typically thought to begin in January of students' senior year because it is not until January 1st that students can begin working on the FAFSA. Data from this study show that the financial aid process actually began several months earlier—the students just didn't know it.

Most students at GBHS began applying for college in the fall of their senior year and the application they started with was CUNY's. Unfortunately, many students at GBHS were not aware that the application forms they were working on would have a bearing on their eligibility for certain college access programs that provide academic, social and financial support to low-income youth. Sally Colón, a college coach and recent GBHS graduate explained:

> Some of them don't know, like when they apply to CUNY, they don't know that they
> have a SEEK [Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge, an opportunity program
> for students at four-year colleges]. They don't know that they have College Discovery
> [CD, an opportunity program for students at two-year colleges] where they don't have to
> pay for everything. I didn't know it was an option [when I applied]. "Do you want to

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apply?" I put, "No." I didn't know…There are these opportunity programs, that they pay

almost everything. I put, "No, no."

In this quotation Sally explains that students miss out on opportunity programs because they

don't know what they are. When Sally was a senior in high school she was deeply engaged in

the college application process yet even she failed to apply for a CUNY opportunity program

because she didn't know what she was declining. The online CUNY application students filled

out states that applying for opportunity programs is optional. Because some students did not

know what "opportunity" meant in this context (or related words like funding, SEEK or CD)

they skipped the section, thereby missing out on an important opportunity.

Like Sally, Ayame was actively involved in the college application process. She regularly

visited the college counselor's office, dropping by during lunch, between classes and after

school. One day in April of her senior year, Ayame entered Elders' office, explaining that she

had been accepted to St. Joseph's College, a small Catholic liberal arts college in New York

State. At first she was very excited but when her financial aid package arrived in the mail her

spirits dimmed. The estimated cost of attendance for the following year (tuition, fees, room

board, books, supplies, travel, etc.) was $48,000. The school outlined a plan whereby $40,000

would be covered by grants and loans, but Amy had no idea how she would come up with the

remaining $8,000. When she explained her "gap" to Thuppy, he asked, "Who'd you do the

application with?"

Ayame: I did it myself.

Thuppy: Why didn't you apply HEOP?

Ayame: I didn't know they had it.

Thuppy: You should have done it with us.

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Although Ayame had been a very conscientious student, although she had taken the school's college prep class and although she attended after school sessions about college-going, she nonetheless was unaware that St. Joseph's participated in the New York State Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP). In the fall, Ayame was focused on her college list. She searched for colleges online and attended college fairs. She applied to more than ten schools, but she was not thinking about paying for college because in her mind she could worry about that later. She did not know that St. Joesph's (or any of the other schools) would not automatically consider her for its opportunity program—even though her academic and socioeconomic background made her eligible.

In May of 2013, although Ayame was not sure how she would come up with the remaining $8,000, she accepted St. Joseph's admission offer. That summer, however, her plans changed. Ayame's college coach, Sally, explained:

Well, it's one of the students, Ayame, she was supposed to go to St. Joseph's but spoke with [the] financial aid [office] and she still had a $8,000 gap and she wanted to take another private loan, but I advised her against that because the interest rates is really high, and she didn't read the fine print. And then she thought, "Oh, I'm covered," but she didn't realize that she already has subsidized and unsubsidized loans, and now I spoke to her last week, and she was going to withdraw completely from college and she first wanted to defer, but she said, "I'm not going to be able to pay this money now. Am I going to pay it later? No!" So she's not attending college in the fall.

Ayame's parents were not in a position to take out additional loans to cover her gap and by the end of the summer Ayame withdrew her letter of intent. Ayame did not attend college the fall after her senior year of high school. The following spring, Ayame, the Genevieve Brooks High

School Senior Class President who graduated in the top 5% of her class, enrolled in a noncompetitive for-profit college in the Bronx. Ayame was a strong student who worked closely with college advisors at GBHS. However, the high cost of college and the structural complexity of the financial aid process prevented her from attending the college of her choice, a college that she was academically qualified to attend. Ayame, like most students at GBHS, did not think about paying for college until the spring. If Ayame had been aware of how the financial aid process is sequenced, or if the financial aid process were sequenced differently, she might have attended St. Joseph's tuition-free.

Uneven institutional support

Stephan (2013) identifies two models of college advising, "the standard model of advising, in which counselors respond to students' requests for help and serve students one-on-one" and a "community organizer" model in which counselors "proactively recruit students into the process, use existing peer networks and create new ones to disseminate information and engage students, and serve students in groups" (n.p.). Educators at GBHS drew on both models. For example, the college counselor often talked about sharing information with some students and having these students use "existing peer networks" to share information. And yet, the adults in the building were far more likely to align their college counseling practices with the "standard model." In interviews and informal conversations they explained that they did not go running after students to make sure they had filled out everything they needed. They made a point of explaining that they were treating students as young adults. Applying to college and obtaining financial aid was the students' responsibility, though they would provide whatever help was needed. As Principal Holub explained,

Well, Mr. Franklin serves everyone who goes to him. We don't think it's Mr. Franklin's job to fix students by himself, and we say if you don't do it by yourself, it's senior year, you're young adults, nobody is going to take you by the hand. The minute someone walks into college office for some kind of help, he will help.

In certain respects, the educators' vision of their counseling model corresponded to what I observed. It was true that Mr. Franklin was happy to help anyone who walked into his office. Nonetheless, the students at GBHS did not have equal access to postsecondary counseling.

Disparate access to financial counseling manifested in two ways. First, most students at Genevieve Brooks High School were not offered the college preparatory class that Mr. Franklin cotaught to eleventh graders. These students therefore were not taught the differences between public and private colleges; between loans and grants; or the difference between the "price of tuition" vs. the "total cost of attendance." Second, Mr. Franklin and his colleague Thuppy Elders gave more support to students with whom they had personal relationships. For example, Allen, who had a close relationship with Thuppy, explained that because of his relationship he didn't even have to fill out most of the application himself.

Jeremy: Filling out the CUNY applications, where did you fill yours out?

Allen: College office. Thuppy did most of mine actually, I mean he did a lot, he pretty much did most of it.

Allen explained to me that he had formed a close relationship with Thuppy over the course of several years by participating in a male empowerment club that Thuppy founded: MVPs (Men Valuing Positive Solutions).

On a number of occasions Thuppy told me that he didn't think college was for everyone and that he encouraged students to follow the path that they most desired. In reality, Thuppy,

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like Mr. Franklin, allowed the students he did not know well to follow their own paths but pressured the students he did know well to apply to a variety of colleges. Neither Thuppy nor Mr. Franklin ever discouraged students from applying for financial aid, but they were far more likely to discuss opportunity programs, college costs, and the FAFSA with students they were close to. While GBHS publicly employed the "standard model" of college counseling (Stephan, 2013), they actually employed both models: the standard model with most students and the "community organizer" model with the students they knew well. In most cases these were the students who hung around the college office and stayed late after school.

Wary Parents.

Most GBHS family members supported the postsecondary aspirations of their children. They wanted their children to enroll in college and they were more than happy to do what was necessary along the way. Some, however, were wary. Applying for federal aid entails submitting one's parents' earnings, savings, assets, and social security numbers. Parents who are not familiar with the financial aid process, parents whose first language is not English, and undocumented parents who do not have social security numbers may be reluctant to divulge their personal financial information. Allen, for example, could not convince his mother to give over her tax return when he asked her in January and February. She worked long hours at a local hospital and was always too tired to get him the documents he needed. She wanted to support Allen, but whenever he asked it seemed to be the wrong time. In the end, Allen did not submit his FAFSA until the summer. Although students who submit the FAFSA late are still eligible for federal aid, they are less likely to receive state and institutional support (King, 2004).

Sally, the school's summer college coach, talked about the challenges one student encountered while filling out the FAFSA. A young woman Sally was working with came to the office with forms, but,

those weren't the right forms to bring, so we tried to do it for the link for FAFSA, and that didn't work either because you have to fill it out exactly word for word or however it is that her mother filled it out, and she couldn't remember. So she wasn't having good communication with her mother because her mother speaks Spanish. I understand that some people don't like to give out information to their children, like there's no communication there, and that's another thing about college, you gotta speak with your parents about money.

College finance literacy involves several dimensions. On the one hand, college financial aid texts are *internally* complex. Filling out the FAFSA requires operational knowledge: one has to decipher the difficult language of the form itself and read it alongside other financial texts like the W-2. The complexity and opacity of the forms have been well documented (Bettinger, Long, Oreopoulos, & Sanbonmatsu, 2012; Dynarski & Scott-Clayton, 2006). Less well documented are the ways in which the texts are *externally* complex. To complete the forms students must talk to their parents about the process and their parents must agree to provide all the necessary documents. Unfortunately, in the United States meaningful conversations about money rarely occur between adolescents and their parents (Jorgensen & Salva, 2010).

Nine months after graduating from high school, the typically upbeat and optimistic Ayame changed her tone markedly when discussing the financial aid process. "The financial aid process can be a barrier," she explained. "The whole application process was frustrating. It was really long and can be really difficult if your parents are not O.K. giving their information,

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especially if they are not native English speakers." What makes filling out the FAFSA so complex is not simply the abstruse bureaucratic language; it is the socioemotional context within which students must engage the text.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown that most students formed college finance perceptions outside of school and that many of their perceptions were incomplete or inaccurate. I then went on to describe how students' vague ideas about college calcified into something I refer to as college finance literacy. Some students, like Royal, developed a robust, critical college finance literacy. Most, however, did not. This may have been because students had to learn about and engage in the financial aid process at the same time. Findings presented here suggest that practitioners should separate *learning about* college finance from *applying for* financial aid. There is a growing consensus among scholars and practitioners that college access work needs to begin early, perhaps as early as sixth grade (Bonus-Hammarth & Allen, 2005; Perna & Kurban, 2013). In recent years, a growing number of precollege preparation programs have emerged to support middle and high school students. And yet, few of these programs are talking to younger students about the important role of college finance or exposing them to college finance texts. Instead, too many programs wait until senior year. When programs wait this long, however, they must provide students with background knowledge and help them through the applications process—all in a matter of months. Students need to learn about the price of college and how it can be financed before senior year. But how? Into what class might college finance fit?

Years ago, home economics would have been a natural place to teach about college finance, but few schools today offer such courses. Many high schools still do teach economics (in New York State students are required to have one semester of economics), but this class tends

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to be taken by students in their senior year and in any case such courses rarely cover what a Fannie Mae Foundation study refers to as personal financial literacy: "the ability to read, analyze, manage, and communicate about the personal financial conditions that affect material well-being" (Vitt, Anderson, Kent, Lyter, Siegenthale., & Ward, 2000, p. xii). Because most mandatory courses (e.g. algebra, biology, English) do not deal explicitly with college finance, schools must be creative. They must consider pockets within existing curricula. For example, in large part because of the Common Core State Standards, middle and high school teachers are assigning increasing numbers of nonfiction informational texts. Such teachers could have students read newspaper reports about the cost of college, financial aid opportunities, or the emerging student debt crisis. Students could be called upon to write essays on whether or not college is a worthwhile investment. While teaching about the 1960s, history teachers could focus in on the Higher Education Act of 1965. English teachers might call on students to write a letter to an elected representative about the shift in higher education spending from government to students and families. No doubt there are many other ways. The most important thing is to provide students with early and multiple opportunities to learn about college finance and engage the texts that they will have to complete when they are applying to college.

If high schools wish to heed the research community's suggestion of providing early college awareness to students in grades 9-11, they will need to develop systems and form partnerships that will ensure all such students have access to this knowledge. Failing to do so—and in particular failing to support students' college finance literacy—would be a great disservice to those students who wish to pursue college.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

I began this dissertation with a pair of questions: *How do students from low-income families who attend a public high school in the Bronx, NY develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes associated with the college choice process?* and *How do educators at a public high school in the Bronx support low-income students through the college choice process?* Questions such as these have been asked for many years by many researchers. Like the quantitative scholars who initiated the college choice field in the 1960s and like the sociologists who brought Bourdieu into the fold in the 1990s, I wanted to know how students and high school educators come to learn about, and participate in, this phenomenon we call college choice. Questions like the two I have posed are longstanding—but they are also urgent. To say in 2015 that the college "premium" (Autor, 2014) is higher than ever is another way of saying that today's young men and women who do not pursue college will be penalized to an extent that their parents and their parents' parents were not. In the years following World War II when jobs were aplenty, someone with only a high school degree in the Bronx (or Chicago, or Los Angles, etc.) could support a family on a single wage. This is no longer the case. If, like Fernando and Yessica and the other participants in this study, a young person hopes to join the middle class, a postsecondary credential like a degree or a certificate is almost a necessity.

To be clear, this dissertation is not a college-for-all manifesto. Like Harold Franklin and Thuppy Elders I respect the fact that not all students wish to continue their education right after high school. And like Anyon (2005) I understand that a college degree cannot undo injurious social forces like racism, deunionization and sociopolitical neglect. And yet, I also empathize

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with students like Krystal who see college as an opportunity to expand opportunities. As Krystal explained to me,

> I always had college on my mind since I live in a bad neighborhood. My mother and my father never went to college and I see how…it could have been easier for them if they did go to college. And I never want to be in that situation.

The question of whether or not all students should go to college is red herring. The more pressing question is: what are high schools doing to support the educational aspirations of students who report that they want to go to college and who, until relatively recently, had been denied access to postsecondary institutions? To wit, what is it like for students who are experiencing this process? This dissertation addresses these questions by homing in on one high school in the South Bronx that had thought long and hard about how to support their students. A qualitative study such as this can only claim to tell the story of one process in one place at one time. Nonetheless, this story has implications for students, educators, researchers and policymakers elsewhere in New York City—and throughout the country. I will discuss those implications presently. First, I will review the major findings of the study.

Interpretation of Findings

Question #1

How do students from low-income families who attend a public high school in the Bronx, NY develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes associated with the college choice process?

Over the course of this dissertation I have noted a number of resources that students drew upon to learn more about college and whether and where they should go. I've discussed the role played by individuals: teachers, counselors, the principal, friends, mentors, family members. I

have also discussed the role of school-based structures: a college prep class offered to (some) juniors, dual enrollment opportunities, regular grade-wide meetings to discuss college preparation, and an internship program. And I have discussed the roles of print and digital texts. Here I expand upon three particularly salient themes.

Forming Relationships with GBHS Staff. Students at Genevieve Brooks High School reported that they relied heavily on GBHS staff for instrumental and moral support while engaging in the college choice process. In a survey administered to the entire senior class, in interviews, and in focus groups, students identified specific content area teachers, counselors and administrators as playing critical roles in their college search and application process. By New York City standards, GBHS was a midsized school. Students weren't known by every adult in the building, but it felt—at least to Krystal Sawyer—like "a big GBHS family." Of the many staff members mentioned, none were mentioned more frequently than Mr. Franklin or Thuppy. A brief exchange during a March focus group illustrates students' perspectives towards these two men.

> *Jeremy*: How important do you think Mr. Franklin and Thuppy are?
>
> *Violet*: Oh my God!!
>
> …
>
> *Royal*: I've known Thuppy since Freshman year so he knows me and how I am and that makes me feel more comfortable.
>
> *Violet*: For me, they're my guidance because I don't have…[Violet pauses and then continues] If it wasn't for them I probably would not have gone to college. I probably would go to the army but they told me that, "You gotta apply because what if you change

your mind?" I would say that they motivate you, they're my guidance and I look up to them. Just don't tell them. (Laughs)

…

Yessica: I feel like since they know what we're going through, they keep attention to us that nobody else does. They feel that we can go far and there's no stopping us. Even if we tell ourselves, "No, we can't do it." They tell us, "Yes, you can." So you better get your butts in that computer, make the phone call, harass, do what you gotta do, and just do it.

Mr. Franklin and Thuppy both knew a great deal about the college application process. Both had been trained by a college access organization in Manhattan, and Mr. Franklin received ongoing training from his organization, College Entry. And yet, it was not their training or their competence that mattered to students. For students like Violet, Royal, Yessica and several other participants, it was their personal relationships with these men that mattered. Mr. Franklin and Thuppy were both young men of color. They listened to a lot of the same music their students listened to and shared some of the same cultural values. When I asked during a focus group if the personal and cultural backgrounds of these men mattered, Natalia responded:

I feel like Franklin, like you said he comes from the Bronx. He knows where we're coming from, with the poverty and how we came from here and we're going to go somewhere bigger. So I would say, he understands our situation.

Relationships are important but they are not inevitable. Most students at GBHS did not have a close relationship with these men. After all, how can two men form close bonds with over 500 students? In June of 2013 I interviewed Thuppy Elders a second time and asked him about my 14 participants. Thuppy was garrulous and would go on and on about the students he knew

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well. For example, I have pages and pages of talk about Shakira and Royal and Ayame. About other students, Thuppy had less to say. Here is an excerpt from the June interview.

Jeremy: Okay, what about Michael? [How would you describe his college preparation and application process?]

Thuppy: Michael, I don't know so much about his college process. I saw him in here doing some work about it, but I don't really know much.

Jeremy: Okay. Liz?

Thuppy: I'm not sure about what she's doing when it comes to school.

Jeremy:All right. Vivian?

Thuppy: I saw her doing some college work, but she's another one, she has to be pushed.

...

Jeremy: Okay, great. Fernando?

Thuppy: I'm not too sure, but I definitely know that he is interested in going to the military as well.[42]

Why did Thuppy and Mr. Franklin form relationships with some students and not others? On the one hand, this is inevitable. Some students seek out adult mentorship, while others do not. Some participants formed bonds with other adults at GBHS, but for whatever reason did not "click" with either of the two men who had the most college-going knowledge in the school. We may not want to blame a school or adults within the school for not forming close relationships with all students. However, in the case of GBHS, school-based structures led to some students getting to know college advisors well and others not knowing them at all. As I

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[42] In fact, Fernando was not interested in going to the military. Fernando wanted to stay close to home so he could look after his parents. He only applied to CUNY. At the time of our discussion, Fernando had been accepted into one of CUNY's opportunity programs at a senior college. He immediately accepted the offer and began taking classes that summer.

note in chapters 5 and 6, Thuppy and Mr. Franklin taught a College Prep class that was offered to students during their junior year. When senior year came and students had to apply to college, those students who had taken the College Prep class felt comfortable talking to and eliciting support from Thuppy and Mr. Franklin. By contrast, those who did not take the class were less comfortable talking to the two men, came to see them far less frequently over the course of the year and therefore received less support. Of the four students noted above (Michael, Liz, Vivian and William), only Liz took the class. No wonder Thuppy was less informed about their college choice experience.

Drawing on Extracurricular Experiences. Students at Genevieve Brooks High School learned about the college choice process by taking advantage of extracurricular opportunities. Some of these extracurricular experiences were organized by GBHS and designed to expose students to aspects of college-going. For example, staff sent students to different CUNY campuses and one private college campus so that they could earn credits, engage with students just a few years older than they and experience life on a college campus. As Krystal explained, "there are some institutes that the school has sent me to better answer questions [and] introduce us to a new society where they are like us. For example, College Today, college students will happily stop you and talk to you." The "dual enrollment" programs—programs that provide high school students the opportunity to take college classes—have been studied by a number of researchers (Allen, 2010). Although some of the studies contradict one another, there is a growing consensus that taking academic dual enrollment courses is associated with increases in college aspiration, preparedness, and matriculation (Allen, 2010). Not all students at GBHS are exposed to dual enrollment programs like College Today, but all students did take part in the school's internship program.

School students were required to complete 120 hours of internship over the course of four years. As Thuppy explained, "We really push internship for them because we want them to know it's not only about being in this building, it's about what you do outside of this building." Students were not sent to different internships to learn about college per se, but many did. Yessica, for example, was sent to Hebrew House so she could earn a CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant) certificate, but once there she benefitted from college application services at the center. As she explained to me, "they actually hired tutors and college counselors. Yesterday, I was in a workshop where we were working on resumes."

Low-income students are less likely than their upper income counterparts to participate in college- and non-college-related extracurricular opportunities (Lareau, 2003; Liu, 2011). These students live in neighborhoods where there are fewer opportunities for extracurricular activity, and even when such opportunities are offered, students are not always able to take advantage of them. Such students often have responsibilities like a job or watching siblings that prevent them from taking advantage of the opportunities that do exist. Still, the students in this study who did take advantage of such opportunities benefitted enormously. Ayame, for example, was a member of a (non-school-affiliated) music program that, as Ayame put it, "invests in your academic endeavors." Her parents were not in a position to pay for a college class she took the summer before her senior year. Her parents were also not in a position to pay for the SAT registration fee. Ayame's music program paid for both. Like other participants in the study, Ayame was able to leverage these experiences when it came time to apply for college.

Peer and Near-Peer Discourse Communities. Students at Genevieve Brooks High School learned about college choice from one another. Previous researchers have discussed the role of peer *groups* (Tierney & Colyar, 2005) and peer *networks* (Engberg & Wolniak, 2010) in

relation to college-going. I prefer the phrase *discourse communities* (Swales, 1990) because it emphasizes the linguistic component of the college choice process. It draws attention to the fact that students engaged in the discourse of college-going when talking to one another and teaching one another about college choice. As the students explained to me over the course of the study, the process of getting from high school to college is disguised in a thicket of jargon and half the job of learning about college choice is learning to break through the thicket.

Ayame, for example, talked about a friend she had had since kindergarten. Together they would go online and read about colleges. They shared resources and edited one another's personal statements. As Ayame told me, her friend would say things like, "Hey, Ayame, look, there's this thing online, they have really good scholarships, check it out." Such relationships benefitted highly active students like Ayame, but they also benefitted students who were not proactively seeking out colleges, working on college essays or trying to find scholarships. By the spring of his senior year, Allen still didn't know where (or if) he wanted to go to college, but it was helpful for him to spend time with his peers and hear them talking about their plans. As Allen explained, "it's pretty much discussion and me just listening to what they know." Each of Allen's friends had a pro-college attitude, and they constantly encouraged him to do what he had to do to get to college.

One surprising finding from the study was the role of "near-peers"—individuals who were a year or two (and sometimes more) older than students. These individuals provided mentorship in the form of college knowledge, encouragement, and instrumental support with applications. Participants in this study talked on a number of occasions about the role of older peers who provided both motivational and instrumental support. For example, Michael talked about "a friend who's in college and it's her freshman year now. She told me what you have to

do. No BS'ing. No BS'ing, do what you have to do." This individual did not offer Michael knowledge or skills, per se. What she did offer was a particular framework, or attitude. From this near-peer Michael learned the importance of perseverance. It is unlikely that this was the first time he was told to "do what you have to do." The difference is that when it comes from a near-peer, students "hear" the message in a different way.

Sally Colón, as I noted in the previous chapter, was a recent GBHS graduate who provided textual support to anyone in the senior class who was interested. She created a Facebook Group and invited the entire senior class to join the group. (Most did.) She used Facebook's messaging service to contact people, text-messaged friends and scheduled meetings with students and parents. Sally had personal relationships with several members of the senior class and she drew on these relationships while doing her work. For example when Victor Guerra wouldn't return Sally's texts she reached out to Victor's girlfriend. GBHS played an important role in this near-peer relationship (Sally's salary was paid by GBHS), but in most cases, students created near-peer relationships on their own. Krystal knew that she was supposed to work on her college essay before the beginning of senior year because she spoke with friends of hers in the senior class while still a junior. Vivian also noted that her "friends that were just out of college a year or two, they all told me about what to do, what I should apply for… so…that's what I did."

 For Gee (2008), Discourse involves more than just words and texts; Discourse is also about values. Among students at GBHS, values were formed in the context of discourse communities. For Fernando, a particularly important discourse community was a group of out-of-school friends. These friends were several years older than Fernando and had recently graduated from college. They explained to Fernando that there was a value to college beyond economics. As Fernando told me, because of his interactions with them, he came to see that

college was not about "going up the ladder" but about "showing dedication." While outside of school, Fernando spent a good amount of time with his near-peer discourse community. While in school, Fernando shared these college-going values with friends like Royal and Victor and in so doing injected the values of one discourse community into another.

Question #2

How do educators at a public high school in the Bronx support low-income students through the college choice process?

In chapter 3 I addressed this question by drawing attention to the importance of college-going Discourse. I was, and continue to be, impressed by the ways in which the school created a positive emotional environment and a rich, college-oriented visual literacy environment. College-going at GBHS was promoted publicly through oral discourse and written discourse. Teachers also discussed college as an inevitability and obligation rather than as a choice. I termed this positive, recursive, and non-directed talk about college "college palaver." Educators at Genevieve Brooks High School used a wide variety of strategies to support students through the college choice process. Here I draw attention to two factors that warrant further elaboration.

Discourse of Inevitability. Educators at Genevieve Brooks supported students through the college choice process by creating a Discourse of Inevitability. As Violet Figueroa put it, "From the 1st floor to the 3rd floor they remind you every day that you are going to college." Educators "told" students that they would be going to college with oral discourse but they also "told" them by curating the visual literacy environment, offering college-preparatory classes, and linking their students to postsecondary institutions. They also prepared them for

college by *not* preparing them for anything else. While Mr. Franklin and Thuppy did talk to students about other opportunities (see chapter 5) and a mathematics teacher did help a few students prepare for the ASVAB (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery), there was no *institutional* effort to prepare students for anything else but college. Of course only preparing low-income students for college has its implications and these will be considered presently.

In chapter 3 I divided the college-going Discourse of Genevieve Brooks High School into four areas— the visual literacy environment, the emotional environment, written discourse, and oral discourse. It is important to note that I have done this for analytical reasons. In reality, students experienced the college-going Discourse at GBHS as one multimodal discourse (Kress, 2010). Students did not experience neatly separated discursive practices, but Discourses that interacted with one another to create new meanings. For example, when Thuppy announced recent college acceptances over the public address system this was not only an example of oral discourse, it also contributed to the emotional environment of the school. When seniors heard their names over the PA system they were proud; when students in lower grades heard the announcements they imagined Thuppy one day saying their names. As a junior, Royal Knight was pretty sure he didn't want to go to college. Still, he explained that, "Sometimes I would be like, oh yeah, I should apply just to hear my name." This was also the case with other students. As Royal recalled, "In my classes I heard some of my students staying, 'Oh, I just want to hear my name. Wait until you hear my name!'" The oral discourse of the school contributed to student aspirations whether the discourse was directed (college talk) or non-directed (college palaver). And these discourses combined with and interacted with other discourses throughout the school.

Gee (2005) tells us that language, while central to human communication and enculturation, never operates alone. Language operates alongside other unavoidable and inextinguishable elements of the human experience. We talk, read, and write from ideological perspectives in particular historical moments. When we bring together talking, reading, writing, valuing, thinking and feeling, we speak of capital 'D' Discourse. Discourse is central to the organizational habitus (McDonough, 1997) of a school, but it cannot, on its own, get a student to college. It does not *cause* a student to apply to college or subsequently enroll. Discourse is better thought of as predisposing students towards, or "priming" students for, college. So-called "priming effects" have been studied extensively by experimental psychologists. For example, as Kahneman (2011) writes, if you are shown the word *eat* you are more likely to subsequently fill in the word fragment SO_P with a *U* (to make the word SOUP), rather than an *A*. Seeing the word *eat* orients your mind to think of food rather than cleanliness. Another study found that voters who cast ballots in schools were more likely to vote for propositions to increase school funding than voters who cast ballots elsewhere. Casting ballots in schools did not cause these individuals to vote to increase spending. Something else happened, something in the environment of these schools nudged them towards voting in a particular way.

A similar phenomenon seems to be at work at Genevieve Brooks High School. The discursive environment primed students to participate in the college choice process. For example, during the year of this study over 90% of seniors and 100% of participants applied to college (most applying to both two- and four-year schools), rates that far exceed national averages for all students, and in particular students from low-SES backgrounds.[43]

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[43] In 2004, for example, 93% of seniors nationwide planned on continuing their education after high school but only 74% applied to a postsecondary institution (NCES, 2012). Among students of low-SES families the numbers are markedly lower. Cabrera and LaNasa (2000) followed the path to college of

Partnerships and Programs. Preparing young men and women for college is difficult

work, and few high schools can do it alone. The administration of GBHS recognized this. The

teachers in the building had all received disciplinary and pedagogical training but none had been

taught to teach students about college or the college preparation process. As the principal, Ms.

Holub, put it, "I mean I have teachers who don't know what SUNY and CUNY is. I didn't know

what SUNY is until my second year in college, like I thought there were three colleges in the

whole New York State and each of them in New York City."[44] And so, to equip students with the

knowledge and skills they needed, GBHS formed partnerships with local organizations and took

advantage of additional programming offered by non-profit organizations and businesses. The

most important partnership was with College Entry. College Entry hired Mr. Franklin (though

GBHS paid his salary) and provided him ongoing training and logistical support. Mr. Franklin

spent his days working with students and when he was not sure of something there was always

someone at the College Entry home office that could help. College Entry provided Mr. Franklin

support—and accountability. It was because of his supervisors that he kept track of where

students were applying, who had taken the SAT, who had applied for financial aid, and so

forth.

Though the relationship had been severed by the beginning of my fieldwork, GBHS had

worked with AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination), the national college-access

organization. GBHS teachers (including Mr. Sanchez who would later teach College Prep) were

trained by AVID, and several student participants (7 of 14) told me that AVID was an important

source of knowledge around college. The school also brought in someone to teach SAT classes

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students who were eighth graders in 1988. By the end of their senior year, only 21.5% of these students
had applied to a four-year college.

[44] An Eastern European immigrant, Ms. Holub had only lived in the United States for a few years when
she began college.

after school. The quality of the classes was much debated by students but according to Shakira,

"SAT prep helped us. I did better on my SATs, by points, like a hundred." The school also

formed partnerships with dozens of internship sites, with CUNY and with a Manhattan-based

college access center that provided professional development to Mr. Franklin and

Thuppy. These partnerships not only provided direct services to teachers and students. They

also reinforced the message that students were college bound. The school invested its time and

resources in providing students extracurricular opportunities, and the students were aware of this.

Implications for Practice and Policy

Historically, high schools have done a rather poor job of providing students early access to

knowledge about college; providing students with any knowledge at all about college finance;

and providing students with textual and extra-textual support around the college application

process. Why is this? First, high schools were not built to prepare students for college. They

were designed to inculcate certain values and provide students with "useful knowledge," but

college readiness was not part of the curriculum (Reese, 2007). Today, over 90% of high school

students report that they want to go to college but high schools still are not doing everything

needed to support their students. This is not to say that nothing is happening. College access

and readiness organizations are growing rapidly and high schools like GBHS are availing

themselves of these services. Still, the individuals on the "front lines" of the college choice

process—the counselors—remain in a precarious position. Their caseloads are woefully high

(from 201 students per counselor in Wyoming to 1,016 students per counselor in California) and

nationwide, these caseloads have remained virtually unchanged since 1995 (Clinedinst, Hurley,

& Hawkins, 2012). If we want to help these counselors to help their students more must be done. Findings from this study suggest some possibilities and I present them below.

Discourse Normalizes College-Going

A college-going Discourse normalizes college-going. For many decades it has been "normal" for middle and upper class adolescents to go to college, but the idea that all students should expect to go to college is a relatively new idea. For example, in 1986 the educational scholar Arthur Levine interviewed more than fifty low-income students and not one of these students saw him or herself going to college. When asked how far they expected to go, "the most common answer was tenth grade, followed distantly by the twelfth" (Levine & Nidiffer, 1996, p. 1). In the eyes of Levine's participants, going to college was not even a consideration. At Genevieve Brooks High School, going to college was the norm. How did GBHS achieve this normalization?

Normalization involved multimodal discursive practices. At GBHS it began with the school creed which read in part, "Today college will no longer be a goal, but an obligation." This creed was reinforced through college talk—clear, consistent advice around college—and college palaver, general comments about college and why college is valuable. Visiting classrooms I heard talk such as "when you are in college" and "next year in college." This palaver did not, by itself, provide instrumental support to students. It did not help students fill out an application form or pay bus fare to get to campus. It did, however, contribute to the broader Discourse of the school.

Policymakers, administrators, teachers and counselors need to address a fundamental question: what should be the norm? In 1900 the norm was an elementary school education. By

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1940 the norm was 12 years of schooling (Fischer & Hout, 2006). *Should* college be the new

norm? At the school level, administrators, teachers and counselors need to come together and

talk about what they want for their students and how—in the current context of the Common

Core State Standards—they will help their students get there. Principals need to set aside

professional development time for matters such as college finance, college entrance

examinations and the college application process. Teachers need to examine and reexamine the

language they are using (along with their concomitant actions) in their classrooms to be sure that

what they are saying comports with their values. Finally, if a high school elects to enact a

college-normalizing Discourse, what about the students who do not wish to go to college or

cannot go to college? A college-going Discourse that is universal and lacks nuance risks

alienating non-college-goers and labeling them *abnormal.*

Alternatives to Associate's and Bachelor's Degrees

There is nothing wrong with nudging students toward college. In fact, doing so is likely

to benefit students in the long run.[45] However, this cannot be done to the exclusion of providing

students knowledge about alternatives. There are alternatives to pursuing postsecondary degrees

and students need to be made aware of them. Currently, this is being done in too few schools. In

New York City, like elsewhere in the country, most high school vocational programs were closed

long ago. Although there has been a recent surging interest in today's incarnation of vocational

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[45] To some readers this may seem like a controversial claim. What about student debt? What about the
remedial classes at community colleges that low-income students take over and over again without
accruing any credits? What about the low graduation rates? Certainly these are real problems that need
to be dealt with. However, they are not so great that we should discourage students from applying to
college. Nor is it possible for institutions to play a purely neutral role when it comes to college-going.
As Thayer and Sunstein (2008) show, institutions always steer individuals one way or the other. Steering
students away from college would not serve the students' or society's interests.

education (career and technical education), most high schools neither offer career and technical education nor make students aware that such opportunities exist.

Fernando put it like so, "It's really awkward, they're like cornering us. There are two real options, either join the military or pay for college. One of them two. It feels like we're being forced." Things worked out well for Fernando who was accepted to an opportunity program at a CUNY senior college, but what of the 29 students who graduated from GBHS but did not pursue college?[46] These students would have benefitted from vocational training or, at the very least, information about how to *access* vocational training. While a postsecondary degree remains the surest route to a middle class job, there are alternatives. Community service programs like Americorps and City Year provide youth the opportunities to contribute to their communities, earn a modest living allowance, and gain skills that can lead to more lucrative work. High school graduates (and those who did not graduate) can also avail themselves of federal, state or city job training programs. In a study published by the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, Carnevale, Jayasundera, and Hanson (2012) describe four other opportunities: employer-based training, industry-based certificates, apprenticeships and postsecondary certificates. Of these four options, postsecondary certificates are a particularly promising option. These certificates can be attained at both community colleges and proprietary schools. They are relatively inexpensive, usually vocationally-oriented and can be completed relatively quickly (most certificates can be finished in less than a year). For students who are not

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[46] According to the New York State Education Department, of the 113 students who completed high school in 2013, 29 did not pursue college. This number is most likely low. Two of my participants who intended to go to college the following fall did not and there is reason to believe other students failed to matriculate as well. Nationwide between 15-22% of low-income graduating seniors who have been admitted to college and intend to matriculate in the fall fail to do so. Among students intending to go to community college, the percentage is higher still (Castleman & Page, 2013).

interested in college, certificates are a viable alternative. For students who are not yet ready for college, certificates can serve as pathway to a college degree some time in the future.

Teacher and Counselor Development

Findings from this study suggest that both teachers and counselors would benefit from further training around the college choice process. Students spend the vast majority of their in-school time with classroom teachers. Among low-income students who do not have family members with college experience, it is from their classroom teachers that they are learning about college. The problem is that while teachers have *attended* college, they have not necessarily *studied* college. They do not necessarily know which local college has a strong arts program and which is preferable for criminal justice, which colleges offer in-state tuition for undocumented students, which private colleges offer travel grants to help low-income students visit home during breaks. As Ms. Holub noted, "I have teachers who don't know what SUNY and CUNY is." In cosmopolitan cities like New York, many teachers were raised elsewhere and are therefore unfamiliar with the local higher education context. This is particularly problematic in high poverty school where many graduates will be attending a local college. Another issue of concern is the class differences that are typically found between teachers and low-income students. Because most teachers of poor and working class students were themselves raised in middle class households, their college application process was likely very different from that of their students. Their idea of college may be ivory towers and dorms rather than state schools or junior commuter colleges.

Teachers also may not be able to accurately gauge how competitive an applicant his or her student will be. In some instances teachers give their students a false impression of where they can expect to be accepted, and it becomes a counselor's unenviable job to dash these

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dreams. Teachers can also unwittingly (or wittingly) discourage students from pursuing college. Teachers are ideally situated to positively influence their students' postsecondary plans: teachers see their students frequently, they have a background in college, and they have received training in pedagogy and literacy. For example, English teachers have been trained in reading and writing pedagogy. They are, therefore, ideally suited to help students read complex college-going texts and write the all-important college essay.

What teachers lack (in general) is a background in the current state of higher education and the college application process. With training, however, teachers can provide accurate information to students and design learning experiences wherein students can gain this knowledge. Ideally, a school would want teachers to provide early access and knowledge regarding college choice (along with knowledge regarding the intersection of careers and college majors) and leave the application process to counselors. However, this is not always possible. Counselors often do not have time to meet with all their students and, as I noted earlier, one in five public high schools in the United States does not have any counselor at all (USDOE OCR, 2014). Until there is enough political will to rectify such structural injustices, schools must adopt a distributive approach to counseling.

Those public high schools that do have counselors need to provide these counselors with regular training. What should this training look like? First, counselors need to be kept up to date on the latest admissions policies and procedures. As Mr. Franklin, the GBHS college counselor explained, "the college process changes every year." Keeping abreast of the latest information in college admissions is important for all counselors, but is particularly so for school counselors who do not have a foundation in college advisement. As I noted in chapter 5, most school counselors are trained to address students' socioemotional needs but not their college-going

needs. Students are likely to benefit if their counselors receive regular training and support so they can provide their students with early awareness around college, and help them and their families through the application process.

However, data from this study suggest that counselors need a great deal more than "content knowledge." They need training in how to help students interpret, critique and compose college-going texts. College choice comes with an entire vocabulary (discourse) that is unfamiliar to most students. Public, private, Associate's Bachelor's, Master's, certificate, FAFSA, tuition, grant, loan, promissory note, credits, and on and on. Just as content area teachers use a variety of instructional strategies to teach vocabulary, college counselors need to do the same. Moreover, it is not enough for students to have a basic understanding of college discourse, they need a *critical literacy*. Is it ok to take on debt? If so, how much is too much? Why is it that if my grades are "too good," I no longer qualify for some opportunity programs? Why are four-year colleges mostly white and Asian while urban community colleges are mostly African American and Latino/a? Providing students an opportunity to gain a critical understanding of college choice takes time and consideration. Doing so requires college counselors to begin thinking of themselves as sponsors of literacy.

Implications for Theory and Research

The college choice process, like other social practices, is mediated by texts, literacy events, and ideological frames. Like other *literacy* practices, college choice is mediated by *particular* texts, *particular* literacy events and *particular* ideological frames. In this dissertation I have identified texts, events and ideological frames that are particular to the college choice process. Some of these factors are common throughout the country. For example, all, or nearly

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all, US college aspirants read college-going *texts* like the online application. Other aspects of the college choice process are particular to specific spaces. Not all high schools, for example, hold during-school college fairs and after-school financial aid workshops. I believe that if we want to truly understand the nature of college choice in the twenty-first century we need to home in on these three factors (texts, literacy events and ideological frames) that have been, if not neglected, deemphasized by scholars.

One possible direction for new research pertains to texts. What other texts do student draw on while engaging in the college-choice process? How do these texts change by social context and how have they changed over time? In recent years there has been a proliferation of online software and mobile technology applications (apps) designed to help students manage the college preparation and application process (e.g. applyful, college abacus, CollegeGo, and CollegZen). How are students using these digital literacies? Who are using these digital literacies? To what extent are they contributing to or mitigating educational inequality? These are pressing questions that warrant sustained inquiry.

A second direction for new research pertains to literacy events. In chapter 4 I examine three of these events. What do comparable college-going literacy events look like in other educational spaces? What strategies are schools using to encourage parents to attend such events? Are schools providing translation services and offering such events at a variety of times to meet the needs of working parents who may not be available in the evening? How are school-based educators helping students and parents to interpret, critique and compose college-going texts? To what extent are teachers, administrators and counselors "sponsoring" students' literacy in the best sense of the word? If the first step is encouraging schools to hold college-going literacy events, the next step is attending to the pedagogies employed during these events.

Finally, an important direction for college choice research involves a careful analysis of the intersection of college choice and ideology. Gee (2008), Street (1984, 2012) and other sociocultural literacy theorists have demonstrated the centrality of ideology to literacy practices. All literacies are shaped by both dominant and local ideological frames—and the literacies of the college choice process are no exception. There is nothing natural or neutral about allowing standardized exams like the SAT and ACT to play outsize roles in determining who gets accepted where. There is nothing natural or neutral about using placement exams to decide whether or not a student is "ready" for college. Nonetheless, such ideologically-driven practices are not only common today, but ascendant. In the twenty-first century, adolescents are drawing on multimodal, multilingual competencies to create novel and innovative texts. What remains to be seen is whether or not colleges will choose to notice.

AFTERWORD

CHOICES NOT CHOICE

On October 13, 2014 I met Royal and Yessica for a cup of coffee. I had seen Royal a few months earlier. Yessica, I hadn't seen since she was wearing her graduation gown 16 months earlier. I was eager to catch up with both of them. In June of 2013 Yessica had told me that in the fall she would be attending a four-year private college a few hours north of her home in the Bronx. Royal had told me he would soon enlist and expected to be in Germany in a matter of months if not weeks. I knew Royal's plans had changed. I wasn't sure about Yessica.

Royal and I both arrived early, so we had a chance to catch up. He told me about Victor who had moved to New Jersey. Victor was working, but Royal expected him to apply to college once he had established residency. Allen was still at a local community college, as was Abdul. He thought Ayame was still at the for-profit college she had been at the previous semester, but she had stopped returning his texts. As for himself, Royal had good news to share. He was in college and doing well. I was surprised. In the spring of 2013 when he was rejected by the Air Force Academy, he told me and everyone else at school that he would be enlisting in the Air Force. The only reason anyone would go to college, he explained, was to "waste money." What happened?

After graduating from GBHS, Royal learned that without a Bachelor's degree he could not achieve his dream of becoming an Air Force pilot. He could still join the Air Force but would be limited to jobs that didn't interest him. When he realized that he could not get the position he wanted, he gave college a second look. He applied again to CUNY (it was too late to matriculate in the fall) and was accepted to one of CUNY's four-year senior colleges. Royal

qualified for both federal and state aid. In the spring, Royal attended college without having to take out any loans. The following fall he was accepted into the school's ROTC program, which provided additional financial support. Royal was on his way.

After about 30 minutes Yessica arrived.

"Hello!" she said to me. Then, turning to Royal: "*Hola, tu*."

We chitchatted for a few minutes. Then she told me what happened with "Ryland College." Although Yessica had talked all year long about wanting to go away to college, at the last minute, she changed her mind. She did not want to leave home. And so, rather than dorm at Ryland, she decided to commute. For two semesters, Yessica commuted every day by train, bus, and sometimes—when she was running late—taxi. She was commuting almost four hours a day. At one point she began carpooling with another Bronxite whose father drove her to school every day, but it didn't make much of a difference. "Basically I spent more time traveling than I did at school," she explained. This proved to be unsustainable. After two academically successful semesters Yessica decided to leave. She reapplied to CUNY and was accepted "conditionally" to one of CUNY's senior colleges. First, she had to pass a mathematics test. I was surprised she had to take the test since Yessica had already passed the Algebra 2 state test with a high enough score to satisfy CUNY's mathematics skill requirement. Yessica was not sure why she had to take it, but she did. It had been over a year since she had taken a math class and when she took the placement test she failed. The senior college rescinded its offer.

"It's shocking, really," Yessica explained, "But now I'm in community college." This wasn't something Yessica was very comfortable discussing. "I'm kind of a little embarrassed, you could say." All through high school when her classmates were cutting class, Yessica always did what she was supposed to be doing. She was one of the first students to get all her

application packets together. She had more admissions essays than she needed, more recommendations than she needed, more acceptances than most. At the time, she felt really good about all of her options. She certainly did not see community college in her future. Still, as Yessica explained to me, she was not defeated. She saw community college as a way station. When she finished her remedial math class she would take the test again, pass it, and transfer back to a four-year school. Which one, she wasn't sure—that was a choice for another day.

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Yelena Holub, Principal

College Preparation and Career/Life Readiness 101

2012-2013

Mr. Sanchez
Mr. Franklin
Mr. Elders

Mission Statement

In a world in which knowledge is changing rapidly and technology is providing access to vast amounts of information, our mission is to hone students' critical-thinking skills and familiarize students with key concepts that they can apply to new situations. Our mission for this course is to provide an opportunity to explore the characteristics, skills, and knowledge that students will need to survive and thrive in terms of satisfaction in college and the years ahead.

Course Syllabus

Unit: Self-Evaluation and Understanding

1. Who am I?
2. How does the present affect the future?
3. What do I need to change?

   Debate

   Speech

   Research/College Paper

Unit: Career Paths
1. What is an ideal career?
2. How can careers be evaluated on financial and emotional levels?
3. Why do people change careers? (guest speakers)
4. Which career path to choose: medical field, legal world, financial "sharks", civil servants, artists, military? (guest speakers)

Unit: College Literacy
1. How can College Education be evaluated?
2. Why is the timely completion of college application process the recipe for success?
3. How do ideal and pragmatic college mappings differ? How to make an educated choice? (guest speakers)
4. Why is College Essay detrimental to successful admission?
5. How can one enhance organizational and time-management skills?

Projects and Assessments:

a. College Resume

b. Completion of CUNY and/ or SUNY applications

c. Personal College Essay

d. College Term Quiz

e. Time Management Quiz

Debate

Speech

Research

Unit: Personal Finance Before, During and After College
1. How can financial situation affect college and career choices?
2. How can one navigate the complicated world of financial aid?
3. What is FAFSA application?
4. Why budgeting skills are as important as organizational ones?
5. How can one differentiate between positive and negative debt?

Unit: Internet Literacy

1. How to make an education research as opposed to search?
2. How to evaluate informational websites?
3. What is intellectual property?
4. How can "publishing" online create or ruin career?
5. Why does adolescent cyber bullying result in legal long-term ramifications?

Unit: Vice and Virtue of College Life

1. Why is plagiarism the "plague" of the contemporary college life?
2. How can accusation of plagiarism ruin one's career?
3. How do ethics affect everyday life?
4. How to avoid negative high school habits in the adult life?
   Debate
   Speech
   Research/College Paper

Ongoing Units:

1. The Art of Public Speaking

Grading Policy

Participation   25%

Speech presentations   25%

Debates   25%

Projects   25%

Groups: At the beginning of the semester you will be assigned to permanent group. You will remain within this group for the remainder of the course. You will work on daily activities, "global citizens" presentations and major group projects with your group. This exercise is essential for acquiring team-working skills.

Participation: Being an active participant in class work and discussions including "Question Fridays", unanimous opportunity to ask teachers "in-basket" questions seeking a life skills advice.

Speech: You will have to give a *demonstrative, persuasive, and informative* speech in class throughout the course. The details and skills required for this activity will be discussed in class and are attached to this syllabus.

Debates: In this diverse world we live in learning from others is a non-negotiable for a growing society. As a student at Genevieve Brooks High School your fellow classmates may look like you in terms of ethnic background and body composition, however their mindset and thought process may vary heavily from that of yours. With that said learning to be tactful, understanding and appreciative of those differences that reside you and another will aid this growing society, thus we debate.

Papers: After every major unit you will have a research paper or college essay due. These papers are used to accurately grade your understanding of the information that is presented in the classroom (world). Listening attentively for key information and relevant data will greatly improve your opportunities to do well on these papers.

APPENDIX B

GENEVIEVE BROOKS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT CREED

"Today I will become a lifelong learner.

Today, with the help of my Teachers I will learn how to become a

leader for tomorrow.

Today, I will not only strive to be academically sound, but I will strive to be an agent of

change in my community.

Today, I will set career goals.

Today, college will no longer be an option, but an obligation.   Today, I have a voice.

Today, I am GBHS."

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