

Date: November 2, 2009

Investigator Box #8180

Faculty Sponsor: Professor Mary Tuominen

Title of Project: Social Reproduction in Charter Schools

1. Under what auspices is this project being done (e.g., class project, senior research)?

This project is being conducted as part of my Sociology/Anthropology senior research supervised by Dr. Mary Tuominen.

2. Give a synopsis of the research project, including a) its purposes, b) who your subjects will be, c) a description of exactly what the subjects will have to do, and d) how the findings will be used.

- a) I am studying the ways in which charter schools reinforce and/or challenge middle class values and cultural capital, as well as the implications charter schools can have on generational poverty. The French theorist Pierre Bourdieu studied how systems of social stratification persist and are reproduced for generations with minimal resistance, and indeed little conscious awareness, from the dominated classes. Bourdieu argued that cultural institutions, particularly schools, play a central role in reproducing unacknowledged hierarchies of domination and maintaining existing patterns of social stratification (Swartz 2007: 42). Several theorists have applied ideas of cultural capital and social reproduction to the British and American contexts, but few studies have considered how cultural reproduction functions within the growing charter school movement. Since charter schools serve somewhat different populations of students than traditional schools, and since many aim to overcome existing patterns of social stratification by improving the opportunities of marginalized segments of the population, I ask whether charter schools succeed in challenging and/or reproducing their students in ways that reinforce and/or differ from the reproduction found in traditional schools.
- b) My participants will be the teachers and administrators at KIPP Journey Academy (KJA), a charter school serving 5th and 6th grade students in Columbus, OH.
- c) I will conduct semi-structured interviews with teachers and administrators at KJA. I have chosen to interview the KJA staff directly, rather than to administer a survey or questionnaire, because interviewing will improve the quality of the data I should be able to obtain. Interviews provide detailed insight into participants' opinions, impressions, and experiences, and may also provide access to privileged information that a participant might not feel comfortable sharing in a questionnaire (Denscombe 2008: 174-175). Because the KJA staff is very small (13 individuals total, of whom I may interview five or six), gaining detailed information in-person should be feasible. Because I want to concentrate on the people who are transmitting particular cultural values, rather than at the effectiveness of the values transmission, it will be more appropriate to interview the staff than the students. I will complement these interviews with six to ten field observations of the teachers in their classrooms. During these observations, I will note the explicit content of the lesson, as well as the teachers' behavior toward students and the physical environment of the classroom. Finally, I will use content analysis of the curriculum employed by KJA teachers, documents produced by and about KIPP (reports, articles, strategic development plans), and of the geography of the classroom and school

space in order to analyze the explicit and implicit theoretical perspective and purported goals of KIPP.¹

- d) The findings will be reported as part of my senior research thesis. I will give a copy of the final report to the KJA staff.

3. Describe how you plan to ensure informed consent (see "basic principles").

Prior to the interviews and classroom observations, I will provide KJA staff with an explanation of the purposes of my research and what they will be asked to do (participate in an interview and allow me to observe their classrooms), and I will ask them to sign a consent form (see Appendix A). Participation in both the interview and the classroom observation will be optional, and I will emphasize that staff can withdraw from participation at any time.

4. Describe how you plan to ensure anonymity and, if not anonymity, confidentiality.

Data derived from my field work (staff interviews and classroom observations) will be confidential. KJA staff will be asked to establish a pseudonym for themselves. I will also use a pseudonym to refer to the school in my report, and I will keep the school's geographic location confidential as well. I will transcribe all recordings of interviews personally, and I will destroy the recordings immediately after completion of the transcription. All data will be kept on my personal computer, which is password protected. I will not leave my computer unattended with transcript files open. Upon completion of each session of reading and analyzing transcripts on my computer, I will save the documents and shut down my computer.

5. Describe any risks or special stresses the subjects must undergo, and why they cannot be avoided.

I do not identify any special risks that participants must undergo. Although it might be inconvenient or potentially stressful for teachers to have me observe their classroom sessions, this type of observation is fairly common at KJA (several KJA classrooms have "observation stations," or small tables set apart from the normal desks, that are explicitly for this purpose). Also, I am currently volunteering at KJA and, as such, am known to many of the students and staff. Therefore, my presence in the classroom should not present too much of a disruption to normal classroom activities.

6. Describe any deception involved, and why it cannot be avoided.

This research will not involve any deception.

7. Describe how the subjects will be debriefed.

At the close of the interviews, KJA staff will be debriefed regarding the nature and purpose of this research (see Appendix B). I will give a copy of the final written report to KJA's principal to be made available to other KJA staff.

¹ While research conducted using content analysis does not involve human subjects, I have chosen to include this information because it forms an integral part of my research strategy.

Appendix A

INFORMED CONSENT

My signature confirms that I voluntarily agree to participate in this research.

Title: Curricular and Social Goals in Charter Schools

Interviewer: Hannah Miller, Sociology/Anthropology Department, Denison University

By signing this form I agree that

1. My participation is voluntary. I understand that I may refuse at any point to participate in this study and that I may stop this interview at any time.
2. The purpose of this study (to explore the curricular and social goals of KIPP Journey Academy, as well as their transmission to students) has been explained to me. I understand that a further explanation of the study will be provided to me after the interview.
3. I understand that my name will not be used in this study and that my confidentiality will be protected.

Signature: _____

Appendix B

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

Sociology/Anthropology Senior Research Project: Curricular and Social Goals in Charter Schools

Denison University 2009-2010

I am exploring the curricular and social goals of KIPP Journey Academy, as well as the ways in which these goals are conveyed in the classroom. This research will consider the ways in which charter schools reinforce and/or challenge middle class values. Since charter schools serve somewhat different populations of students than traditional schools, and since many aim to overcome existing patterns of social stratification by improving the opportunities of marginalized students, this research will investigate the ability of charter schools to effectively challenge social and economic stratification.

If you would like to know the results of this study, a copy of my final paper will be available in the KJA office by early May. Thank you very much for your time and your willingness to participate.

Interview guide: Teachers

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your family background?
2. Can you tell me a little bit about your educational background? (Probe: elementary and secondary school attended, college(s) attended, degrees)
3. Can you tell me a little bit about your prior teaching experience?
4. What led you to teaching at KIPP?
5. What do you hope to accomplish during your time as a teacher at KJA?
6. How is teaching at KJA similar to teaching at other schools where you have worked in the past?
7. How does teaching at KJA differ from teaching at other schools where you have worked?
8. How are the students at KJA similar to the students you have taught in the past?
9. How are the students at KJA different from the students you have taught in the past?
10. For many of the KJA students, this is their first year at a KIPP school. Are there things about KIPP that your students found it hard to adjust to at first?
11. Since it's also your first year at the school, what about KJA did you find difficult to adjust to at first?
12. What are the most important factors which you believe affect your students' academic success? (Probe: personal motivation/abilities, family/home life, teachers/school environment)
13. Which of these factors do you believe you, as a teacher, can address?
 - a. Why?
14. Which of these factors do you believe you cannot address?
 - a. Why?
15. What do you see as the primary constraints restricting your students' educational opportunities? (Probe: home life, previous educational preparation)
16. What would you describe as the primary opportunities your students have in attending KJA?
17. Are there any commonly held attitudes that students demonstrate toward school?
 - a. What variation do you see among the attitudes of different students?
18. What are some of the biggest problems you face daily in your classroom? (Probe: behavior, lack of time to prepare lesson plans, inadequate preparation of students, distracting environment)
19. How do you expect your students to behave while they're at school?
20. How do you encourage students to act in accordance with the KIPP slogan "Work hard, be nice"?
21. What values do you try to instill in your students?
22. What values do you think traditional public schools instill in students? (Or, how do these values differ from the values instilled in students at traditional public schools?)
23. Does being a successful KIPPster require that a student change his or her lifestyle in some way?

- a. If so, how?
 - b. Does it depend on the student?
24. Do you ever feel as if you are acting or need to act as a particular student's parent?
 - a. If so, how?
 25. How would you describe your students' academic and career aspirations?
 26. How would you describe *your* academic and career aspirations for them?
 27. How do you negotiate between the desire to hold students to high expectations while simultaneously recognizing that their past schooling may make it difficult for them to meet these goals?
 28. Can you tell me a little about your students' linguistic abilities? (Probe: grade level at which they read and write according to standardized tests, how do the average KIPP student's linguistic abilities compare to those of other students you've taught)
 29. Can you tell me a little bit about how you group students in the classroom or for assignments? (Probe: reading groups, table assignments, quality of work)
 30. What do you believe makes someone an effective teacher? (Probe: teacher characteristics, experience, motivation)
 31. What do you believe makes *you* an effective teacher?
 32. What do you believe is the function of public education?
 33. What do you believe is the function of education at KJA?

Interview guide: School leader

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your family background?
2. Can you tell me a little bit about your educational background? (Probe: elementary and secondary school attended, college(s) attended, degrees)?
3. Can you tell me a little bit about your prior teaching experience?
4. What led you to become the School Leader at KJA?
5. What do you hope to accomplish as the School Leader at KJA?
6. Has your previous experience teaching Reading and Writing at a middle school affected your ability to be an effective leader at KJA?
 - a. If so, how?
7. How are the students at KJA similar to the students with whom you have worked in the past?
8. How are the students at KJA different from the students with whom you have worked in the past?
9. For many students and teachers, this year is their first at KJA. What struggles did students face in adjusting to the KJA environment?
10. What struggles did teachers face?
11. What makes someone an effective teacher at KJA?
12. How do you evaluate your teachers' performance?
13. How do you evaluate potential teaching candidates when making hiring decisions?

14. How do other staff members (e.g., Nancy, the Director of Service Learning; Sienna, the Business Manager; or Miss Owens, the Office Manager) contribute to KJA's mission?
15. What are the most important factors which you believe affect your students' academic success? (Probe: personal motivation/abilities, family/home life, teachers/school environment)
16. Which of these factors do you believe you and your staff at KJA can address?
 - a. Why?
17. Which of these factors do you believe you and your staff *cannot* address?
 - a. Why?
18. What do you see as the primary constraints restricting your students' educational opportunities? (Probe: home life, previous educational preparation)
19. What would you describe as the primary opportunities your students have in attending KJA?
20. I know you sometimes substitute in the classrooms when teachers are absent. What are some of the biggest problems you face in the classroom? (Probe: behavior, inadequate preparation of students, distracting environment)
21. How do you expect your students to behave while they're at school?
22. How do you encourage students to act in accordance with the KIPP slogan "Work hard, be nice"?
23. What values do you and other members of the KJA team try to instill in your students?
24. Do you ever feel as if you or your teachers are acting or need to act as a particular student's parent?
 - a. If so, how?
25. How would you describe your students' academic and career aspirations?
26. How would you describe *your* academic and career aspirations for them?
27. How do you negotiate between the desire to hold students to high expectations while simultaneously recognizing that their past schooling may make it difficult for them to meet these goals?
28. What do you believe is the function of public education?
29. What do you believe is the function of education at KJA?
30. What do you believe makes someone an effective school leader?
31. What do you believe makes *you* an effective school leader?