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ABSTRACT

This report details findings of one year of a seven-year study of the relationship between pre-college enrichment experiences and the development of academic ethos, or scholar identity, in disadvantaged adolescents, both African American and European American. Under the auspices of the University of Tennessee, Project EXCEL examines the development of scholar identity in center city, college-bound sophomores as they participate in a university-sponsored enrichment program of reading, writing, and French or German foreign language study. Students are self-selected for application to the program and represent individuals who possess the potential for completing college level work, but who do not have the academic background. Each student participates for three years and receives a one-year follow-up, whether or not they attend college. The project's academic program builds student self-confidence and images of selves as individual scholars. This report presents findings from one facet of the Project EXCEL study, the ethnographic examination of the process of identity construction in EXCEL and non-EXCEL student participants in the tenth grade honors English course at Augustana High School. Findings suggest that emphasis on scholastic preparation without equal attention to a strong sense of academic identity ignores a significant factor in the student's preparation for college. This study's participant observations suggest the establishment of a community of respect that facilitates respect for self and others, supports the expression of individual opinions, and, through that process, results in the construction of identities. Actual student participant comments are included. (Contains 33 references.) (NAV)

PROJECT EXCEL: DEVELOPING SCHOLAR IDENTITY WITHIN A COMMUNITY OF RESPECT

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Contemporary research on academic achievement and achievement motivation of educationally disadvantaged youth has generated questions concerned with the interrelationship of race, class, and gender, that is, how these factors are conceptualized by teachers and students and how students experience them with regard to their academic development. While much attention has been directed to the fact that these variables intersect at different points and in different ways for each individual (Andersen & Collins, 1992; McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993) and to the notion that race — neither fixed nor measurable but a "dimension of human representation" (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 155; McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993) — is a complex and global concept, issues linking race and education remain at the forefront of discussions on school reform. Because of the history and complexity of problems associated with race relations in educational settings, several of those discussions focus on how students construct their identities with regard to race.

Complex issues of identity construction have been central to research on students who define themselves — whether based on race, gender, class, or ableness — as being on the margins of school life (Apple, 1990; Cross, 1991; Hall, 1992; Hudak, 1993; McCarthy, 1990). To the extent that they must deal with inequality of educational opportunity, that is, limited access to the academic resources of their more privileged counterparts, disadvantaged students, in general, and African American disadvantaged students in particular, are even more acutely affected by variables which marginalize them and place them at the periphery of an educational institution which, based on an "alleged meritocratic system" (Mickelson & Smith, 1992, p. 360), presumably aims to unilaterally support academic achievement. Disadvantaged students, however, burdened by schools inadequately equipped with materials and curricula that would better provide them with experiences routinely offered the best-prepared students, with undeveloped potential that remains neglected because of

grade point averages that do not rank in the top ten percent or scores on standardized tests that do not exceed the national norms, and sometimes, but not always, a lower economic status that prohibits them from taking advantage of supplementary programs and materials to improve their skills, are often forced to adapt to an environment in which they are constantly entreated to achieve but in which they experience infrequent success and commonplace assaults on their competence. If they are to succeed, such students are faced with constructing an academic identity that not only fosters but sustains achievement despite factors which compromise and, in many respects, impede their progress. Increasing concern with the alarming lack of policies which deal effectively with the dynamics of social and cultural relations and strategies which address these difficulties (McCarthy, 1990) underscores the significance of identity construction as a factor related to academic achievement.

PROJECT EXCEL

For seven years (1989 - present), we have conducted a longitudinal study of the relationship between pre-college enrichment experiences and the development of academic ethos (scholar identity) in disadvantaged adolescents, both African American and European American. Our study, Project EXCEL, under the auspices of The University of Tennessee, examines the development of scholar identity (academic ethos) in center city, college bound sophomores as they participate in a university sponsored enrichment program of reading, writing, and foreign language study (either French or German).

The students self-selected for application to the program and represented those individuals who possessed the potential for completing college level work but not the academic background.

In addition to demographic information and transcripts, the application required each student to write a rationale for participating in the program and to meet the following criteria:

1 2.5 G.P.A. in college preparatory courses

2. above average performance on the Tennessee Proficiency test (80% on English and Mathematics sections)

3. reading at grade level

4. stated desire to attend college

Members of the EXCEL Advisory Board (a twelve member board of community leaders in education, business and industry) reviewed the applications and recommended students for interviews with the project directors. Since literature on student achievement stresses the importance of parental involvement, parents as well as students were interviewed.

For the first six years, the project operated during the summer months of June and July at the University, with high school teachers using objectives and texts found in first and second year college courses in English, German and French.

This year the program moved into a local high school, Augustana, as part of the regular college preparatory curriculum with a cohort of thirteen African American sophomore students. Since students from Augustana had participated in the previous summer projects at the University, the school administration, guidance counselors and teachers were familiar with the project. Students who met the criteria received a brochure describing the program and an application form from the guidance counselors. As in the past, the program will operate for three years (sophomore/senior years), including a one year follow-up of all students, whether they attend college or not.

In designing the study, we focused on two major questions: (a) Can a transition program build academic ethos (scholar identity) in educationally disadvantaged African American and European American college-bound students? and (b) What combination of subjects and classroom experiences are most critical to the development of academic ethos and which of these would have the most impact on the student? The focus on these questions was not accidental, but delineated our tacit theory that in addition to potential and appropriate pre-college preparation, educationally disadvantaged adolescents had to develop their own definitions of scholarship in order to achieve academically. Nor could these definitions be provided by any program or presumed to exist in spite of White privilege (McIntosh, 1994); rather, they had to represent personally constructed commitments to and definitions of excellence which emerged in participants as they engaged in challenging intellectual tasks and career goal setting.

Thus, central to all the goals in EXCEL is the development of academic ethos (scholar identity) in which the meaning of "scholar" for each participant is constructed from perspectives and attitudes derived from academic study. To facilitate this process, the project's academic program concentrates on building the students' self-confidence and images of themselves as scholars, not as templates, but instead as individually derived academic "selves".

As researchers, we recognize the influence of tacit theory on any investigation. As Goetz and LeCompte (1984) note, "the research questions that investigators formulate are influenced implicitly or explicitly by the personal experiences (e.g., Peshkin, 1982) and philosophies (Apple & Weis, 1983) that shape their interests and the way they think" (p. 41). Thus, several assumptions and biases influenced our decision to investigate academic identity formation in African American adolescents.

TACIT THEORY

We began the study with biases based in part on our own experiences as African American women identified at an early age as "college material". Our collection of those experiences revealed that more than just a concentration on academic skill-building accounted for our completion of undergraduate and graduate degrees. Over a period of time and in several discussions about how we individually arrived at the points in our professional lives that brought us together to work on this study, we realized that while we were from very different social backgrounds, we shared not only a personal dedication to achievement and excellence that had withstood the assaults of systemic oppression but also a similar path in the development of academic identities that had common roots in the commitment to education in the African American family and community.

On the surface, our socioeconomic statuses looked like opposite sides of a coin with starkly contrasting imprints. In the examination of these contrasting imprints, however, it became clear that there were a number of common and essential elements in our upbringing and education that became fused as part of the same coin, or academic identity. For us, this fusion explained our consequent commitment to and realization of academic achievement. While our educational experiences did exhibit in some ways marked contrast, they were alike in that they provided a sound base for building academic skills.

Despite the emphasis in both situations on academics however, neither individual ever lost sight of the fact that there were circumstances that might act against her and that it was necessary to devise ways to work around those barriers; for even though the academic atmosphere in both situations instilled motivation and teachers were generally very supportive, there were nonetheless

intermittent negative messages suggesting to each of us that, because of our race, our ability to achieve beyond a certain limit was questionable. For example, co-author B's application to a small, exclusive private school (which offered her a full scholarship), was temporarily delayed by a principal who, questioning the student's ability to adjust to and succeed at the school, withheld transcripts. Similarly, co-author A was told by a White teacher that she could expect no better than a grade of C in her projected college major because of her "deprived background".

We noted in our discussions that the striking bonds we shared in preparation for our professions lay, along with the development of strong academic skills, in support from our homes and communities and in a third variable, the view of ourselves as achievers, that is, as individuals who expected to achieve academically. Such family and community support for the idea that one could and must achieve despite either unfounded implications to the contrary or more overtly racial barriers reflects a core value emerging from the experiences of African Americans, who have long held the belief that education was a way of breaking the constraints of limited social and economic opportunities.

Validation from our environments not only protected us in potentially oppressive situations but also reinforced the notion that there was no question about our ability to achieve, and achievement consequently became for us an intrinsic value that was nurtured by extrinsic support and outcomes. At some point in our academic development during this period of adolescence, though, it seemed that the extrinsic validation was turned inward and came from within, and we began, despite negative counter messages about our abilities, to evaluate our own performances, to identify our own strengths and weaknesses, in short, to develop an academic identity sufficiently fortified to be self-

sustaining. As part of this we gradually understood that education was to be seen as a possession, which, driven by a personal sense of, and pride in achievement, could never be taken away. Furthermore, this education could be passed on to others, directly, through teaching and advising, and indirectly, through serving as role models. Because this commitment to excellence and to the life of the mind was recognized as a permanent possession, it was internalized as a way of being free and as a key to freeing others.

We recognize that this view of our formation of an academic identity, which rested on common principles that ignored the deficit model of African American life and withstood societal barriers and other forms of oppression, did not uncover something new. These same sentiments are echoed in testimonies of such respected African American educators, as W.E.B. DuBois and Carter G. Woodson. Furthermore, these ideas continue to reverberate in conversations among contemporary African American professionals in their debates on the current state of education and their attempts to account for the lack or ineffectiveness of the same principles which guided them. In comparing our experiences and reflecting on this formation of an academic identity in today's Black youth, we conjectured that it might have something to do with the construct of re-invention (hooks, 1994; Nieto, 1994), a process which serves to both support and propel the individual toward higher levels of achievement. To test this tacit theory then, we constructed our study using an action research design with the theoretical underpinnings of symbolic interactionism and critical theory, to examine the interactions and context within which the students in Project EXCEL constructed meaning.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In constructing this framework, we utilized the seminal research of (McClelland, 1953) to examine our tacit theory that the acquisition of the heuristic skills necessary for admission to college alone did not insure the academic achievement of African American adolescents identified as college bound.

In one sense, academic ethos or academic identity is analogous to achievement motivation, defined in that seminal research as "the personal commitment to a standard of excellence, the willingness to persist in the challenge, struggle, excitement and disappointment intrinsic in the learning process" (McClelland et al, 1953; Atkinson, 1966, as cited in White, 1984, p. 121). This idea, along with the presumption that self-esteem and self-concept in Black youth were identical, helped to establish in the earliest studies on racial identity a paradigm in which low/high esteem translated, respectively, into poor/high academic achievement. A further extension of this paradigm includes and embodies the notion that self-concept and group identity are unilateral in nature and bear a direct relation to one another. This view led researchers to conclude that academically successful Black students in predominantly Black communities who have "to 'choose' between the individualistic ethos of the school . . . and the collective ethos of their community . . . develop a raceless persona in order to achieve academic success" (Fordham, 1988, p. 55).

At the same time, however, McClelland's thesis that achievement motivation is a "stable personality trait possessed only by those individuals whose cultures (including race, environment, child-rearing practices, religious values and social class) stress competition with standards of excellence" (1953, as cited in Castenell, 1984) remains wanting in light of innumerable studies which

have examined complex issues of identity construction in African American youth and their relationship to academic achievement. This complexity, which is marked by continuity as well as change, is particularly important in considering possibilities for stimulating new, positive dimensions of self in Black youth. As Cross (1991) notes:

> Any identity change may involve (1) carrying over, in an intact state, certain traits or components linked to the "old" self; (2) the transformation of old elements into new elements; and (3) the incorporation of new dimensions of self that are not traceable to either old or transformed traits associated with the former self (p. xiii).

Thus, current discourse on Black psychological functioning (Cross, 1991; Powell, 1989) is informed by research which has recognized the multidimensional nature of self-concept and group identity, "involving both a multidimensional personal identity, or general personality domain (PI), and multifaceted group identity, or reference group orientation (RGO) domain" (Cross, 1991, p. 73). This assessment of the diversity and complexity at the core of identity construction in Black youth underscores the findings that a strong/weak global self-esteem does not necessarily translate into respective high/low achievement motivation. Research has shown, for instance, that global self-concept is not directly associated with the motivation to succeed (Bledsoe, 1967; Campbell, 1967; Epps, 1969, as cited in Powell). At the same time, it has been demonstrated that academic self-concept, a component of general personality, is one variable which affects academic achievement (Jordan, 1981; Power, 1973, 1979, 1985, as cited in Powell).

Attention has also been directed toward the way in which cognitive constructs, such as perceptions of ability and control, interpersonal evaluation, future expectations and other inferences about why things occur, as well as personality factors may affect achievement-related behavior in Blacks (Graham, 1989). Because self-esteem is prevalently construed to be a sub-set of the global self-concept and composed of "ideas and attitudes that are part of the self-evaluation process," one can develop and examine an academic self-concept in Black youth that will result in a model of self-efficacy and foster academic achievement (Powell, 1989, p. 71). Powell notes:

> The real linkage to academic achievement for Afro-American children is academic self-concept. Academic self-concept is enhanced by pro-social strategies for coping with racism and overcoming the blocked opportunities that youngsters may encounter because of racism. The pro-social strategies for coping with racism provide a self-enhancing channel for the anger and frustration and use that psychic energy to create a feeling of self-efficacy and self-worth. However, the pro-social strategies for overcoming racism presuppose that the significant others that the student incorporates into his or her sense of self can articulate those concepts and model them (pp. 79-80).

Arguably, then, the student, African American or otherwise, with a sense of identity based on a strong, positive self-concept and who is motivated to excel academically is best prepared to face the challenge of developing a "collegiate" or "professional" self (Welch, Hodges & Warden, 1989).

This paper presents findings from one facet of the Project EXCEL study; the ethnographic examination of the process of identity construction in EXCEL and non-EXCEL student participants in the tenth grade honors English course at Augustana High School. Augustana is a center-city

school of 670, of which 95% are African American. It has only one English class at each level which is designated honors/college preparatory. Thirteen EXCEL students and nine non-EXCEL students participated in the class. The class consisted of African American students except for one female student and the teacher who were European American. The Project EXCEL students were categorized as honors, college prep, and basic. All others were honor students. (See Appendix A)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The analyses of data from the first five years of the project, including interviews with EXCEL participants, their parents and teachers (in the regular classrooms and in EXCEL) suggest that some EXCEL students do develop academic ethos (scholar identity) while others do not. In this portion of the study, we further investigate that finding by trying to understand how the students in EXCEL, the non-EXCEL students, and the high school English teacher interpret the meaning, expectations and motivations related to academic achievement in the English class. For us, this was important as the project had moved from a university based summer enrichment program to Augustana. Only through such interpretations could we further our study's investigation of academic ethos and our own understanding of the meaning of academic achievement for these students and how those meanings related or did not relate to their individual achievement in class. Thus the following research questions framed this portion of the study:

1. What are the experiences of the EXCEL and non-EXCEL students in the English class?

2. What links, if any, exist between these experiences and the meanings of academic identity, positive or negative, constructed by the EXCEL and non-EXCEL students

participating in this class?

METHODS, DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSES

The choice of research methodology represented our recognition of how "the other" has been constructed by those who participate in qualitative research as well as how we have "spoken of and for others while occluding ourselves and our own investments, burying the contradictions that percolate at the self-other hyphen," (Fine, 1992, p. 70). Thus, in constructing this portion of the study, we recognized that despite our shared racial identity with the EXCEL students, we needed to self-consciously set about to "work the hyphen", and, in so doing forestall an inscription of the students or the imposition of our own "master text".

Since this phase of the study focused on what was happening in the English class, the authors chose participant observation as the primary methodology. In this role, the observer is present in the classroom but not participating or interacting with other people to any great extent during data collection (Hatch, 1985).

Because of the nature of the research questions, we decided to emphasize what occurred in the classroom and the meanings derived from it for the students and teacher. Parent interviews, the grades, writing samples and test scores which are part of the larger study data, were not primary sources. Rather, greater emphasis was placed on collecting interview data from the EXCEL and non-EXCEL students and the classroom teacher. In this paper, we focus exclusively on reporting the student and teacher comments during the classes.

Data also included articles from Clarkville's only local newspaper, two student newspapers, a school community newsletter, an Augustana student handbook, and the school's annals (see Appendix B).

Analyses of the data focused on the interaction patterns among all students (EXCEL and non-EXCEL) and the teacher as well as the themes which appeared in discussions. Using key words, concepts and patterns as brackets, categories emerged and within them themes. This inductive method of analysis insures that experiences are not labeled but rather are discovered, analyzed, and interpreted from data collected from the in-class observations and interviews. These data were analyzed deductively to test the themes discussed in the remainder of the paper.

THE COMMUNITY OF RESPECT - 10TH GRADE HONORS CLASS (AUGUSTANA HIGH SCHOOL)

The focus of data collection and the resulting data analysis were based upon how the students and teacher interacted during the English class, how knowledge was constructed in the class, and how the participants perceived themselves and their experiences related to discussions of text selections from The Little Brown Reader (Stubbs & Barnett, 1993), an anthology of essays used in first- and second-year university English classes. The major themes which emerged centered on the classroom functioning as a community of respect. This community respect, in turn, facilitated respect for self and others (Theme I), supported expression of opinions (Theme 2), and generated the establishment of identities (Theme 3). What happened in the classroom was driven by community respect and was influenced by what happened outside of the classroom in the school, local area, and the larger community.

Site Description--Area, School Classroom

To understand the context of the classroom community, one must know something of the contexts which surround it. Augustana resides in a business district of east Clarkville. The major road through this area boasts several churches, homes, a middle school from which Augustana derives the bulk of its population, business establishments, nightclubs and a large subsidized housing development. Some of the nightclubs and the housing development periodically appear in the local newspaper as "scenes of violence."

Much of the main road is being repaved, making it bumpy and difficult to travel. A local community group is attempting to attract new business to the area and there is a new convenience store at the corner. Despite a small influx of new businesses, turn-over remains high. Even so, there are some businesses which are considered "community staples", including a dry cleaners and barber shop which have been in the same locations for 25 years.

Augustana, several blocks down this major road, is the product of an all White and all African American school merger which occurred in the early 1970's. The school merger resulted in "white flight," leaving Augustana a predominately Black institution. Augustana stands out as a large brick building on the right side of the street and trees line the grass in front of the sidewalk. The school is bordered on the right by a dry cleaners, with a funeral home and residences directly across the street. The addition, containing a "state of the art" basketball gymnasium means that Augustana stretches to the corner. There is a large parking lot for faculty and staff at the right side of the building behind a wire fence. Three signs appear in the front yard of the school, two of which relate to past basketball championships won by the school, while the third is a marble sign that says, "A

mind is a terrible thing to waste."

Over the main door in the school building a blue "sheriff's" watch sign appears alongside of a yellow sign found in all Clarkville schools about the illegality of carrying firearms. The English classroom is on the second floor of the school. The hallway is painted pale blue, the floors are clean, and the lights in the room bright. Brown metal lockers, with and without locks, line the hallway. The class meets in room 213 from 8:45 - 9:50 a.m. (See Appendix C)

In the class, the emphasis is on college preparatory reading and writing assignments and instruction is handled by one teacher, Ms.Young. The Project EXCEL students in this class are comprised of honors, college preparatory, and basic level, and all others are honor level students not in Project EXCEL (see Appendix A). In the class, the teacher evaluates and grades written work based on each student's academic level, but in class discussions, all students are encouraged to express their opinions, which are given the same weight. While these discussions are central to classroom activity and the interactions among students and teachers, in-class papers, role play, small group, and journal writing are also included.

THEMATIC ANALYSES

The data suggest that a community of respect exists in the 10th grade Honors English class at Augustana High School. What occurs between the teacher and students is influenced by what occurs outside of the classroom in the school, the local area and the larger community. The following discussion drawn from the analysis of the data focuses on how each of the three themes is enacted in the classroom.

Community Respect Facilitates Respect for Self and Others

In the English class, attention to issues of respect for self and others is a priority (See Appendix D). This attention is reflected in the patterns of interaction (both verbal and non-verbal). Initially, the respect is reflected in the greetings by name exchanged by the teacher and students at the beginning of each class. The significance of this ritual to the development of a community of respect is illustrated in the following series of exchanges between Ms. Young and students before class begins:

Cynthia (one of the non-EXCEL honors students) arrives in class and says, *"Ms. Young, you not at the door."* Luke (a Project EXCEL student) comes and asks about the last papers the students submitted. Ms. Young tells him they are in one of the trays next to the door. Regina (non-EXCEL student) arrives and says, *"Ms. Young, you need to control your door."* Ms. Young responds, *"I'm getting ready to come out there."* Cynthia repeats her earlier comment adding, *"Good morning, Ms. Young, you're not at the door."* Ms. Young responds, *"I'm looking something up."* Clearly, a ritual of greeting students by name and handling pre-class problems had been established in the classroom. Whenever that ritual was violated, either by the teacher's need to *"look something up"* or by other circumstances, the students in the class noticed and commented.

During class discussions, Ms. Young also demonstrates respect for students by asking questions which invite a wide range of opinions and also by sharing her own opinions with the students. This aspect of the community was illustrated clearly in a discussion on faith related to one of the readings. The teacher and students had written in their journals and then began to talk about their experiences and opinions. Ms. Young shares two incidents in her life but reminds students, ".

. . (this) is my own perspective, respect that, don't treat it as gospel, just that way for me." After her comments, Rachelle (EXCEL), Regina (EXCEL), Shanda (EXCEL), Keely (non-EXCEL), Diane (EXCEL), Victoria (non-EXCEL), and Richard (EXCEL) express their opinions about the role of *"faith"* in their lives. They also question other students in the class and each other. As the discussion develops, the teacher reminds the students about the expectation of respect for others:

"Let me interject, when we go over this section on religion . . . hostile feelers (at this point, the students laugh at the use of these terms), feelings (can) get hurt (if you're not sensitive). When you make comments . . . everybody has been very respectful." At this point, Rachelle (EXCEL) says, *"Oh, did I say it mean or something?"* . . . she mentions that talking about religion is like talking about race. Ms. Young says, *"Ya'll have been real good about not being rude. When we're discussing religion, we need to be extra careful."*

One of the students, Linda (non-EXCEL) is a Jehovah's Witness and other students question her politely and express curiosity about the tenets of her faith. As they ask questions, Linda explains aspects of her belief calmly, responding politely to follow-up inquiries. Much later in the discussion, Ms. Young brings up the Crusades and Jihad. Rufus (non-EXCEL) asks what the teacher's definition of Jihad is and Ms. Young replies, *"Holy War."* Rufus responds that it means *"to struggle"*. Ms. Young answers, *"I've been misinformed . . . thank-you Rufus."*

This vignette is typical of the discussions observed in which the teacher and students share a wide range of experiences without apparent strain and discomfort. In the choice of language, Ms. Young's expectation of respect for self and others is reflected as she thanks students for contributions to the discussion, apologizes to them when she believes she has wronged them, and includes *"please"*

with any request, even reminders of appropriate behavior (e.g., *"Ya'll listen, please."*). Frequently, both Ms. Young and the students will say *"excuse me,"* inferring that people are talking and not listening to what is being said.

Ms. Young is equally clear about the expectation that people will demonstrate respect rather than disrespect for others. Often she can be heard saying, *"We don't do that in this classroom"* when students make comments which can be categorized as *"put downs"*, or personal arguments, or laughing at or making fun of one another. On three occasions, Ms. Young asked a student or students to leave the room when they got into personal arguments with each other. She also interjects the words, *"be respectful,"* which seems to imply a rule and expectation for both the students and herself. In turn, the students' behaviors suggest they have internalized this rule since they raise their hands to speak, take turns speaking, listen to the opinions of the teacher and classmates with whom they may agree or disagree, and address each other by name when making comments. In the interviews, Ms. Young made these observations about demonstrating respect in class discussions:

"I want them to learn to respect each other, I mean me, of course, too, but to respect each other. Well, just as I would want to give them the respect for their opinions, I want the other people in the class to do the same thing. Now whether you agree with their opinions or not, you need to let them say what's on their minds and we don't put each other down, we don't tell each other to "shut up", and if someone says something that you disagree with, it's okay to disagree but don't put them down because you disagree. And, those are our general guidelines for discussions at the beginning of the year and after a while they get into it and they understand. I think that they like that. Well,

you can't have a learning environment, if you don't have respect, I don't think . . ."

These comments, in concert with the class observations, suggest that the expectation of respect for self and others is a core value which Ms. Young deliberately sets about to model and require of the students. In turn, respect for self and others contributes to the community of respect by facilitating thinking and the expression of differing and occasionally controversial opinions (by both students and the teacher) during classroom interactions and in written communication. (See Appendix D)

Community Respect Supports Expression of Opinion

A second theme which emerged from the data involved community respect, facilitating the expression of a wide range of opinions on a variety of topics and subjects. Much of the class discussion grows out of the articles in the Little Brown Reader. One of these discussions centered on the prison system and a spontaneous role play in which several students spent time in a "cell" while other students asked questions. After class, Rachelle approached the teacher and said: *"Great discussion. We love this class."* Ms. Young responds, *"I thought you all said you didn't like it."* Rachelle looks, gestures toward the work on the board and says, *"We don't like all that."*

Occasionally, the students express their opinions about the book through "moans and groans" when Ms. Young asks them to take out the book. However, afterwards, most become quickly involved in the discussion, particularly since text selections are chosen to which the students relate well. Students do not hesitate to convey their ideas to Ms. Young (e.g., Rufus' explanation of the word "Jihad"). Another example involved a discussion of the Studs Terkel essay, "Three Workers", in which the experiences of a prostitute are described. In the work, Regina found the word 'intimacy'

which she said meant to her *"to have sex,"*. Two other female students and Ms. Young emphasized that the word could also mean *"willingness to share innermost thoughts."* As the discussion progresses, Regina decides to get a dictionary while Suzanne (EXCEL student) looks up the word in her thesaurus without prompting from the teacher

Still another example involved the discussion of the confederate flag. Rachelle and other students suggest that it symbolizes slavery, while Ms. Young explains that while growing up the flag symbolized the South for her but now she has been *"enlightened"*. During this discussion, Ms. Young asks the students if they feel pride in being from Tennessee and they respond *"no."* On this day, the students are quieter than on other observation occasions. Neither verbal nor non-verbal behaviors provide a rationale. Instead, toward the end of the discussion of the flag and other examples related to issues of free speech, Ms. Young says:

"All I want you [to understand] . . . (Pause) . . . [It's a] hard time talking about difficult subjects. Basically, what I want you to see . . . (Pause) [is] so many gray areas. Everybody agrees this is okay, this is not . . . draw a line in what you think about it, not black and white related to freedom of speech." Later she added, *"This has been a difficult class period but you all have been real patient."*

In a follow-up interview the teacher had this to say about the discussion:

"I found out a lot about them, you know when I said, "Don't you feel pride being from the South and being from Tennessee?" and they were like, "Well, no." I was astounded, absolutely astounded."

"It was a very difficult discussion. The kids handled it pretty well. I thought, you know, they could have turned on me easily and I knew where I was going with that and that was a possibility, and I felt like they stuck with me that day at times when it was very difficult and I appreciated it but it was hard on all of us."

Still another example of differing opinions expressed within the community occurs in a discussion of work, welfare, and child support. Some of the female students disagree with the males about child support issues. As stated previously, students express opinions with varying degrees of frequency and intensity. At one point in the discussion, Alisha (non-EXCEL student), Shanda (EXCEL student) and a chorus of other female students become involved in a heated argument about mothers who work, go to school and spend time with their children. Alisha tells the other girls across from her to *"shut up"* and they retort that *"she has an attitude."* The girls' statement seemed aimed at reminding Alisha of the rule that differing opinions could be expressed without censure. At another point, Tommy (EXCEL student) is trying to add his opinion to the discussion and says, *"Excuse me,"* twice when he is interrupted. Ms. Young reinforces Tommy's right to speak with *"He has the floor."*

In other discussions, when students appeared inattentive or off task, the teacher did not draw attention to the behavior verbally. Instead, she utilized physical contact (places her hand on their shoulder, pats their back, or uses her phyisical proximity to them) to ask a student to be quiet, to put something away, or to pay attention. Occasionally in the larger group or in the small student clusters, Ms. Young would ask the students to be considerate, quiet, or to listen when their voices rose. From the beginning of the school year, she emphasized that the students must support their opinions with

effective thinking, written and oral arguments. About this emphasis, Ms. Young said:

"You know, I can't orchestrate a class discussion because I never know what other people are going to say and they may come up with more and different ways of looking at things that never occurred to me and if I try to orchestrate it then I'm taking away that spontaneity of their interpretation and that's all part of thinking. See, if I do all the thinking, then they don't. So, you have to let them take the ball and go with it."

An example of *"taking the ball and going with it"* occurred in a discussion on welfare. In a prior written assignment, students were asked to answer questions related to the readings, to write structured, five paragraph essays and to write creative es :ays on the readings. Although grammar is not emphasized in the honors curriculum in Clarkville, Ms. Young reviews grammatical problems which occur in the students' papers. In one instance, she asks the students to correct their papers before they would be given credit. On a least two other occasions, she talks about the importance of grammar on the AP writing test required of all 11th graders in the state. As. Ms. Young assists students in developing and refining writing skills, she emphasizes respect for their opinions. As she hands back each paper, she mentions to the students that most of her comments appear on the front rather than in the body of the paper and that the papers did not take as long to grade as previous efforts (demonstrating that their mastery of grammar and punctuation was improving). Quietly, she adds, *"Please don't take it as I'm putting you down"* and emphasizes that she wants to help them develop strengths in writing while working on weaknesses. She cites Shanda's feedback (on two occasions) that students needed more positive feedback on their work than they were receiving from the teacher. In the follow-up interview, Ms. Young reflected on her response to Shanda:

"Well, I wanted her to know that I listened to what she said to me and I didn't want to take up class time (in the first instance) because she was angry, and this could have degenerated into a "you don't like me" kind of thing, and I didn't want it to degenerate to that. I wanted to diffuse that and say, "Well, we need to talk about that later." I knew she probably was not going to come back, but if she did I would have talked about it to her privately and probably apologized that I didn't put a positive comment on her paper. Since she didn't, I felt like the next time I gave out papers, that it would be a good thing for her to hear me say, 'I heard you and I'm sorry,' and now she's away from the anger but it also empowers her . . . it empowers her when she feels that she has been slighted (and can say) "I've been slighted." And that is important in life."

In the class, respect for differing opinions appears to support students' freedom and self-confidence to express their ideas and permits them to practice appropriate ways to respond to those with whom they disagree.

Community Respect Facilitates the Establishment of Identity

Community respect appears to facilitate identity construction among the students. This finding emerged most strongly when students were asked to read aloud their papers about identity, followed by a student-led discussion about the issues which they confronted as they prepared the papers. In their identity papers, the students reflected on how they had changed, and several said they were more confident and had matured.

The assignment required students to discuss in a creative essay how their identities had changed during the years. For the oral presentations, students stood at a podium, while the teacher sat at their desk and admonished the rest of the class to *"demonstrate your upmost respect for your*

classmates." Summarized below are phrases and quotes that reflected the students' perceptions of the changes in their identities:

Cynthia (non-EXCEL): *"I have more confidence . . .am expressing myself more . . . and doing what is best for me."*

Linda (non-EXCEL): *"I'm more interested in what is out there on other planets, My hopes and dreams are my identity."*

Regina (non-EXCEL): *"I have learned to speak and think about others. . ., and stopped being so hostile."*

Richard (EXCEL): Interested in going other places and finds humor in things, *"has greater urge to compete"*, being comfortable arguing with caution.

Roger (EXCEL): Doesn't sit in the corner like he did in the 8th grade. Plays sports and talks on the phone more, not too many people like his friends but he does *"because they are my people."* Says that he *"takes nothing from no one."*

As students read, Ms. Young provides feedback and their classmates applaud. At this point, the teacher says, *"Ya'll are doing a good job. By the way, you've matured a great deal."*

Diane (EXCEL): *"I am a black woman who has achieved a lot"*, loves and gets along better with her mother.

Julius (EXCEL): Moved here from Alabama and has a job. Has learned to go places he never thought about. Says he is being more competitive.

Shanda (EXCEL): Says that people say she has options open to her, but that she is hard-headed. She talks about family support. Wonders what will happen and thinks about where she is going to college. Is more outspoken now. Says she doesn't mean to be rude but she doesn't want to talk about certain things.

Luke (EXCEL): Says that he is interested in mind states, not identities. Identities are superficial. (He sees himself as) older, wiser, unique individual self.

Students applaud at the conclusion of the feedback on both presentations. Keely, Rufus, and Rachelle (non-EXCEL students) are not there to present papers. Several students mention having more confidence, being expressive, and being more mature. Ms. Young encourages the class to continue to take stock of themselves and their goals. (It's a) *"good way to give yourself a pat on the back."*

Identities Related to Community of Respect

Two of the three discussions which occurred in the classroom suggest that student perceptions of identity are closely related to the community of respect. The first of these involved feelings of pride connected with being from the South or Tennessee. Students did not seem to have strong connections with the larger communities in which they live. This was illustrated in the major topics and transitions which occurred in the student-led discussion partially reported below:

The discussion focuses on the school system and the differential ways in which Augustana and its students are represented in Clarkville. Keely says, *"I understand that we're a black school . . . put us on T.V. . . [there is] more going on."* Ms. Young suggests that being a *"black school"* and more T.V. exposure are not necessarily connected and encouraged Keely not to think of herself or the school negatively. Keely responds, *"That's not how I was making . .* (and is interrupted by other students' verbal affirmations). Ventura adds, *"People down our school, expect us to do bad stuff"* and mentions specifically how the school is presented on T.V. Latisha begins to talk about area high schools and says, *"We are the only predominantly black high school left in Cox County . . ."* Ms. Young interrupts saying, *"I don't want you to even think along those lines . . ."* Latisha nods and later places her head down on the desk, ending her involvement in the discussion.

In the continuing discussion, Ventura mentions how "bad kids" are sent to Augustana, those who are frequently involved with the juvenile justice system. Shanda expresses similar sentiments. Ms. Young asks, *"How can you change the school's image?"* The students offer examples of positive activities occurring at the school, including the science fair, and Ms. Young mentions that she has seen the names of students in the class and from the school in the local newspaper. Another student counters that the school is mainly recognized for its athletics (e.g., football and basketball teams). Luke says, *"Was going to say that . . ."*, adding athletics are mentioned more than anything. He continues that when Ryan (a school which began as all white, became interracial — 60% white and 40% black — and had been closed two years ago) was open, all that was discussed about either schools was their rivalry in athletics, not academics. Ms. Young introduces the topic of academic identity, observing that in the first two years she taught at Augustana, no male senior qualified academically to become "Mr. Augustana", an award given for academic excellence. Glancing

pointedly at a group of male students, she added, *"I know we have kids who will qualify."*

The discussion continues with issues of power, representation and action becoming topics. Nicole says that voting for class officers to address Augustana's image problems was *"favoritism to me."* Luke replies, not loudly, but clearly, *"I did not vote."* Ms. Young says, *"I know you feel powerless at times,"* but questions whether the students would want teachers rather than themselves to select candidates or officers. The students express frustration with how little has been accomplished by the current class officers. The class begins to brainstorm ways in which they could increase class activities. Luke mentions wanting to go on field trips as a possibility and Victoria voices her desire to make a senior trip. Ms. Young responds, *"Don't sit back and wait and blame everybody else."* Again, students blame sponsors and officers who do not appear to be taking responsibility. To help the students think of the problem differently, Ms. Young asked, *"Shanda, you play basketball, what would you do if someone on the team mishandled the ball?"* Shanda replies, *"Get it"* and continues, *"I'm going to tell it like this about taking the ball, can't take too much with a referee."* Shanda then asks Ms. Young if she will be their sponsor but is told that Ms. Young is already the 9th grade sponsor. Nicole and Keely say that they want to form committees. Luke and Shanda note that other people may take the credit for their initiative for the work, but Ms. Young emphasizes the importance of the end result. Luke talks about *"getting started"* and field trips. In an authoritative voice, Victoria turns to him and says, *"Pay first, then get buses."* During the discussion, the teacher has remained in front of the room. At this last comment, however, she laughs. As the discussion moves to other activities, Nicole asks if the students could have a meeting of *"the whole 10th grade class"* in Ms. Young's room, and Ms. Young replies, *"Yes . . .I am happy to help you, I want you to do well and to have things for yourselves."* Until the bell rings, the students form

committees.

In addition to demonstrating how the students moved from discussion to action, this vignette also reflects their frustration with the representations of the school and themselves and what actions they would like to take to secure better opportunities for themselves.

In the follow-up interview, Ms. Young expressed her views about Augustana's and the students' images:

"I think the population at large sees Augustana as a failure as far as schools are concerned. I think they see it with fear. I think they associate Augustana with violence and ignorance. I just want it to be perceived as another high school in Cox County. I mean, it's that simple."

"I feel the kids sometimes see themselves the way Clarkville at large sees Augustana, not the [one section of the city] but Clarkville at large. And I have had many experiences where I have gone to people and they say where do you teach? And, I say Augustana and they go "Oh", you know like "I feel so sorry for you." And it really bothers me. It bothers me number one because we've got some very bright, bright kids here. I hate for them to be perceived that way and I feel that a lot of the kids perceive themselves that way because of that kind of pressure. The more we're out in the community, the more we participate in academic contests instead of just sports contests, the more we make a name for ourselves and a good name (the better our image will be). You know if I could do anything single handedly, if I could do that, you know, we could go out in speech contests and things of that nature and make a name for ourselves and people (would) say, "Oh my gosh, there's somebody from Augustana, you gotta be good."

The data suggest that the community of respect found in Ms. Young's class facilitates the construction of student identities. Although aware of the pressure and prejudices which circumscribe the wider community's perceptions of them and Augustana, they see themselves as worthy of respect. The expression of differing opinions fostered during class discussions assists the students in learning to understand each other and in reflecting on the emergence of each evolving identity. An area for continued study involves the significance of the interface between the school community and the larger communities within which it is situated and how that interface influences the students' continued identity constructions.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The participant observations in the 10th grade Honors English class at Augustana High School suggest the establishment of a community of respect which facilitates respect for self and others, supports the expression of individual opinions, and, through that process results in the construction of identities. With both EXCEL and non-EXCEL students, Ms. Young has created and shared an environment that is shaped by respect. For the students, what occurred in the classroom is influenced by this community respect and also by what occurred outside the classroom in the school, local area, and the larger community. A related and critical finding is that students (whether EXCEL or non-EXCEL) do not seem to identify with the larger communities within which they live and pursue their education. Although preliminary, these findings suggest that emphasis on scholastic preparation without equal attention to a strong sense of academic identity ignores a significant factor in students' preparation for college (Welch, Hodges & Warden, 1989). The data from this phase of Project EXCEL underscore the need to continue research on the dynamics of social and cultural relations as well as the representations of "self" that exist in school settings. Further, they argue for

investigations of the impact of such dynamics on the construction of a scholar identity as a central component of academic achievement.

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