"*BUT IS WHAT WE GIVE THEM ENOUGH?*":

EXPLORING URBAN SMALL SCHOOL GRADUATES' JOURNEYS THROUGH COLLEGE

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
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Abstract

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Lori Chajet

Advisor: Professor Michelle Fine

New York City's small schools movement began in the mid-1980s with a social justice agenda to offer academically-unscreened low-income students of color an education most-often reserved for the middle-class, one that would prepare them for college. While research indicates that small schools outperform their comprehensive school counterparts, what has not been adequately studied are the experiences of small school graduates in college. This dissertation addresses this gap and, in doing so, speaks to the overarching question of the power and limits of small school reform. By looking across students' secondary and post-secondary experiences, this study illustrates what can, and cannot, happen when a school enacts "institutional agency"; that is, when it has a critique of the social reproductive functions of education and uses its power to redefine traditional educational practices and structures.

Using primarily qualitative methods, with a focus on ethnography, the author studied one small public high school in New York City and its graduates' post-secondary experiences. Central to the graduate follow-up research was a three-year longitudinal ethnography of six students' transition into and through college, complimented by a comprehensive survey that established trends across graduates.

Together the data show that when a small school redefines structures, practice, and relationships, it produces graduates who significantly outperform national averages in rates of college attendance and persistence, and who emerge with an increased desire to continue their learning as well as the skills and confidence to navigate higher education. At the same time, their journeys collectively demonstrate the complexity of implementing a college-for-all mission given the reality of the obstacles low-income students of color face in college; while the gap in who begins higher education has narrowed along race, ethnicity, and class lines, who persists to graduation has not. The dissertation presents implications for small schools, K-16 education, and the political-economic policy that shapes the lives of low-income students of color. Highlighted is the important role secondary schools must play in the struggle for social justice, as well as the need for a web of reforms, most notably within the system of higher education.

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CONTENTS

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

New York City's small schools movement began in the mid-1980s with a social justice agenda to right the wrongs of urban public schooling.[1] Despite, and because of, the many constraints of the educational system, small school educators set out to create schools that would offer academically-unscreened populations of low-income students of color an education most often reserved for the affluent (Anyon, 1980). As Deborah Meier (2002a), founder of one of the first small high schools and pioneer of the movement, explained, "When people think 'those kids' need something special, the reply we offer…is, Just give them what you have always offered those who have the money to buy the best" (p. 49). Elaborating upon this, Meier wrote,

> [Small schools] follow in the tradition of many of New York's independent private schools, a tradition few believed was appropriate for public education. They are places that successfully embody a conception of education that challenges most urban public schools' low and trivial expectations… [offering] a rich and interesting curriculum full of powerful ideas and experiences aimed at inspiring its students with the desire to know more, a curriculum that sustains students' natural drive to make sense of the world and trusts in their capacity to have an impact upon it. (p.16)

Inherent in this vision of educational equity was that graduates of these small public high schools, like graduates of elite private schools, would be prepared for and expected

[1] "Small schools" have come to mean many things as they have proliferated across New York City and nationwide. Between 2002 and 2006, 162 small schools were established in New York City alone. Some of these schools test students to enter, and some are open to all; some focus on traditional learning, and others on project-based learning; some are staff-run, and others have traditional governance structure. This dissertation uses the term "small schools" to refer to a group of schools in New York City committed to a common set of pedagogical and organizational principals. These schools see small size as necessary but not sufficient – and so, in addition to their small size, they resist practices like tracking and high-stakes testing, give teachers power over curriculum and assessment, and generally redefine traditional school structures to allow for a personalized and academically rigorous education for all students.

to attend college.[2] This goal may not seem radical, however in a system where more than half of the students were entering high school with skills one to two years below grade level (Fine, 1991); graduation rates were as low as thirty to forty percent (Fine, 1991); and students were more often than not taught by under-qualified teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2001; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996) in under-resourced schools (CFE v State of NY, 1999; Kozol, 1991); it was – and remains – a radical notion.

In many schools the work of overcoming such odds is left largely to students themselves, to their own sense of agency to navigate a system that is seemingly designed for their failure. For teachers in small schools, however, overcoming the odds *is* the work of schools; they view it as their responsibility to figure out how to reform the unjust policies, practices, and structures of "factory-model" comprehensive high schools that have had devastating effects, especially on low-income students of color (Anyon, 1997; Fine, 1991; Kozol, 1991; Nieto, 2000; Valenzuela, 1999). Their approach: they have reconceptualized what David Tyack and Larry Cuban (1995) refer to as "the traditional grammar of schooling" by redefining everything from school size, to curricular content, to classroom methods, to teachers' and students' roles, to school governance, to scheduling, to staff development, to use of space.

With this belief in and commitment to the mediating role schools can play (Apple, 1995; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993; Fine & Weis, 2001; Freire, 1998; Giroux, 2001), small school educators have created schools that enact *institutional agency*. That is, they work

[2] While a college degree may no longer guarantee a stable job with benefits (Anyon, 2005; Lafer, 2002) it is still the best hope for social mobility: average yearly earnings based on degrees for 23-34 year olds in the United States are as follows: less than a high school degree – under $20,000; high school degree/GED – under $30,000; some college/Associates - $30,000; Bachelors - $50,000; advanced degree – upwards of $70,000 (Education Trust, 2001).

from a clear understanding and critique of the social reproductive functions of education within the United States (Apple, 1990; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Giroux, 1997), but do not allow that understanding to represent what it far too often does: determinism without hope. Instead small school educators use their power to question, redefine, and act, offering a statement of hope about the role schools can play in tackling inequality and resisting the status quo. As Michelle Fine wrote (2000),

> It is always small schools educators and activists who bring together other educators, other schools and other communities to resist the resistance [to change], to demand what could be for all children, to imagine and insist upon a public education system dedicated to social justice. (p.175)

The odds facing small school educators in doing this work are vast, and, though these odds do not thwart the efforts of small schools, they do make the realization of their long-term vision and their day-to-day work, remarkably complex. The first batch of these schools were founded at a time when New York State was allowing urban drop-out rates to soar; neglecting the widening funding gap between urban and suburban schools (making it particularly difficult to attract and maintain qualified teachers[3]); and increasing expenditures for jails while decreasing them for education (CFE, 1999). It was also a time when the more predominant initiatives in education reform ran counter to the goals of democratic education, towards standardization, "back to basics," and high-stakes testing (Aronowitz, 1998; Giroux, 1989; McNeil, 2000). Many of these trends have continued since the founding of the original small schools in New York City, with some becoming even more pronounced.

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[3] Schools with high concentrations of students living in poverty have more under-qualified teachers than schools without high concentrations of students living in poverty. High poverty schools (those where more than 49% of students qualify for free lunch) have 27% of their core academic teachers teaching out of their area of certification in comparison to 19% of teachers in low-poverty schools (those where less than 20% qualify for free lunch) (National Commission for Teaching and America's Future, 1996). Furthermore, while 20% of teachers in high-poverty schools have three or fewer years of teaching, 11% of teachers in low-poverty schools do (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000).

Further complicating the work of small schools are the multiple socio-emotional, health, and academic issues which many of their students bring to high school. In keeping with their commitment to serving an unselective population of New York City's students, upwards of 60% of students in small schools qualify for free-lunch, in comparison to 54% city-wide (Foote, 2006); consequently, the majority of students struggle with the everyday realities of living in poverty in America – insufficient health care, insufficient employment, insufficient nutrition, insufficient housing, among other things (Rothstein, 2004).

Research indicates that, despite the complex obstacles to establishing and sustaining effective small schools (Fine & Somerville, 1998; National Evaluation of High School Transformation, 2004; Wasley et al, 2000), they perform considerably better than their comprehensive school counterparts. Individually, and collectively, small schools have been able to: reduce drop-out rates, increase attendance rates, increase college-going rates, raise student achievement, reduce violence, improve teacher satisfaction and retention, increase parent involvement, better support special-needs students, improve overall school culture, and establish a deeper sense of student affiliation (Ancess, 2003; Ancess & Wichterle, 1999; Ayers, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Darling-Hammond, Ancess, & Ort, 2002; Cotton, 2001; Gladden, 1998; Fine, 1994a, 2001; Howley, Strange, & Bickel, 2000; Klonsky, 1995; Lee & Loeb, 2000; Lee, Smith, & Croninger, 1995; Powell, 2000; Raywid, 1997; Stevenson, 2006; Wasley et al, 2000; Wasley & Lear, 2001).

Research also indicates that small schools have taken the first critical steps towards realizing their goal of college-for-all. As noted, small schools have increased college-

going rates at the same time as they have decreased drop-out rates. For one set of 28 small schools in New York City,[4] with a 9.9% drop-out rate in comparison to a city-wide rate of 19.3%, 91% of the students were accepted to and planned to go to college in comparison to 62.6% city-wide (New York Performance Standards Consortium, 2006).[5] Small schools have accomplished this in part by countering trends in urban public schools towards sorting the college-bound from the non-college-bound (Oakes, 1985; U.S. Department of Education, 1995) and counseling low-income students of color away from college (Burd, 2002; Carnevale & Rose, 2003; Gandara, 2002; McDonough, 1997).[6] The message that *all* students are college material is communicated through, among other things, all students taking the same college-prep curriculum, completing at least one college application, and meeting with a college counselor or advisor to discuss higher education (Bloom, 2005; Meier, 2002a).

At the same time, many small school educators want to know what happens once their students get to college: How effective are they at preparing their students for higher education? What roadblocks sit in their graduates' paths? How well are their graduates able to navigate the obstacles? One small school principal, in thinking about such questions, first recounted the rigorous academic experiences the students at his high

[4] These schools, which are a part of the New York Performance Standards Consortium, are 28% African American, 43% Latino, 19% White, and 9% Asian/Other. In comparison, New York City high schools are 35% African-American, 34% Latino, 17% White, and 13% Asian/Other. 60.7% of students in Consortium schools qualify for free lunch in comparison to 54% of students across New York City high schools.
[5] These statistics can also be compared to Mortenson (2000) who shows that for every 100 students who begin 9th grade in a comprehensive high school, 67 finish high school in four-years, 38 go to college, and 18 earn an associate's degree within three years or a bachelor's degree within six.
[6] Nationwide only 25.7% of African-American and 22.6% of Latino high school students are enrolled in full-college-prep tracks in comparison to 42.1% of Asian-American and 34.1% of white students (US Department of Education, 1995). Furthermore only 28.3% of low-income students are enrolled in college prep tracks in comparison to 65.1% from high-income backgrounds (US Department of Education, 1995).

school undergo, along with the numerous interventions made around college-going, and then posited,

> I know we have given our kids the kind of personalized education that has helped them to be successful human beings over the last four years…*But is what we give them enough*? Will the students be able to overcome the inequities of college? Of the work world? Can they leave their families? Can they make schooling a priority? Will the scholarships be there year after year? Will they be resilient enough? We have worked too hard to let them fail the next step. (Littky, 2000, p. 167. Emphasis added.)

Small school graduates are up against tremendous odds when they enter higher education, particularly as a population of predominately low-income students of color. On the one hand, aspirations for college-going have increased across all high school students, regardless of race, class, ethnicity or gender – over 95% of high school students report that they plan to go to college (Rosenbaum, 2001); moreover many more high school graduates are at least beginning college – within two years of graduating high school 86% of Asians begin college, 76% of Whites, 71% of African-Americans, and 71% of Latinos (Adelman, 1999).[7] At the same time, however, persistence and attainment rates have not kept pace:

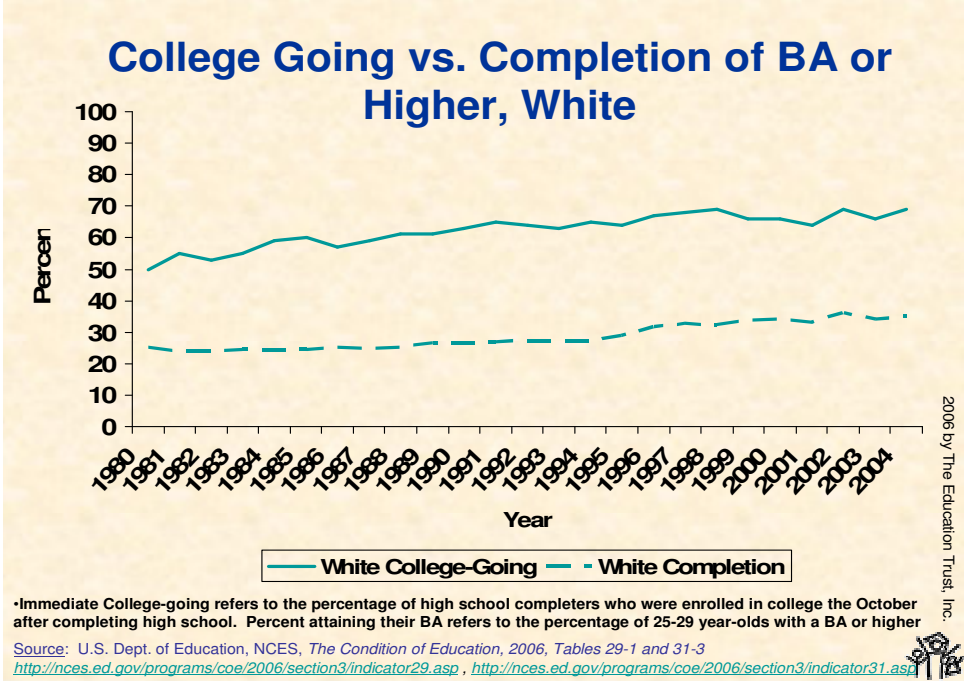
- One in six African-American and Latino low-income college students leave during their first year, and a total of one in three leave by the end of their second year (Swail, 2003).

- Of those students who begin college, a total of 63% graduate within six years – 77% of high-income students, 54% of low-income students, 67% of White students, 47% of Latino, and 46% of African-American (Berkner, He, & Cataldi, 2002 in Carey, 2004).

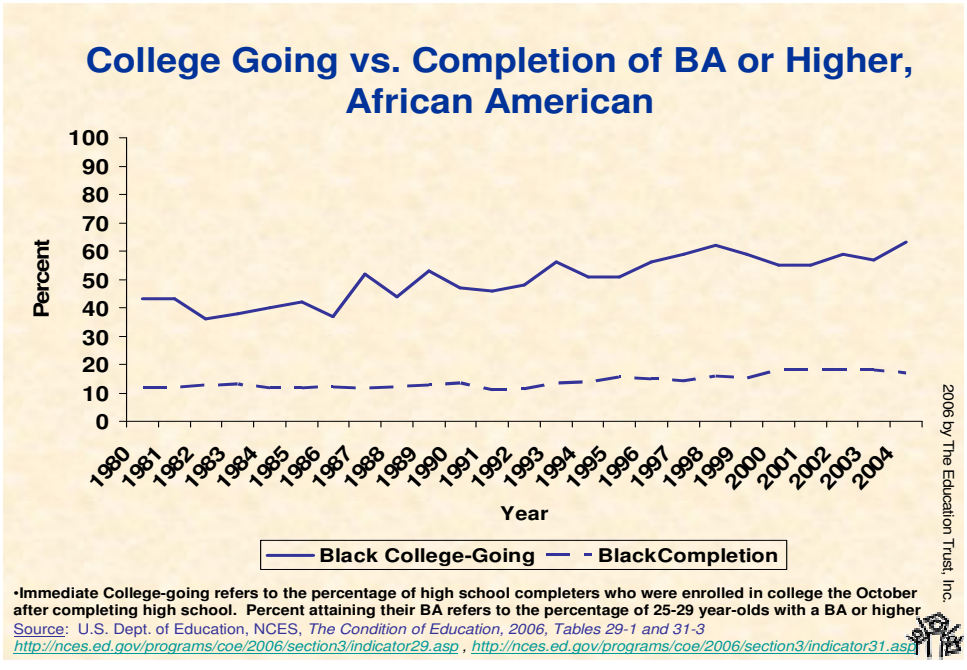
- 29% of Whites, 17% of African-Americans, and 11% of Latinos 25 years or older have a bachelor's degree (US Department of Education, 2003).

[7] While the gap in college attendance has narrowed significantly in regards to race and ethnicity, it has not narrowed nearly as much in regards to income levels. In 1999 over 85% of high school graduates ages 18-24 from the highest income quartile had participated in college in comparison to approximately 58% from the lowest income quartile (Mortenson, 2001 in Gladieux 2004).

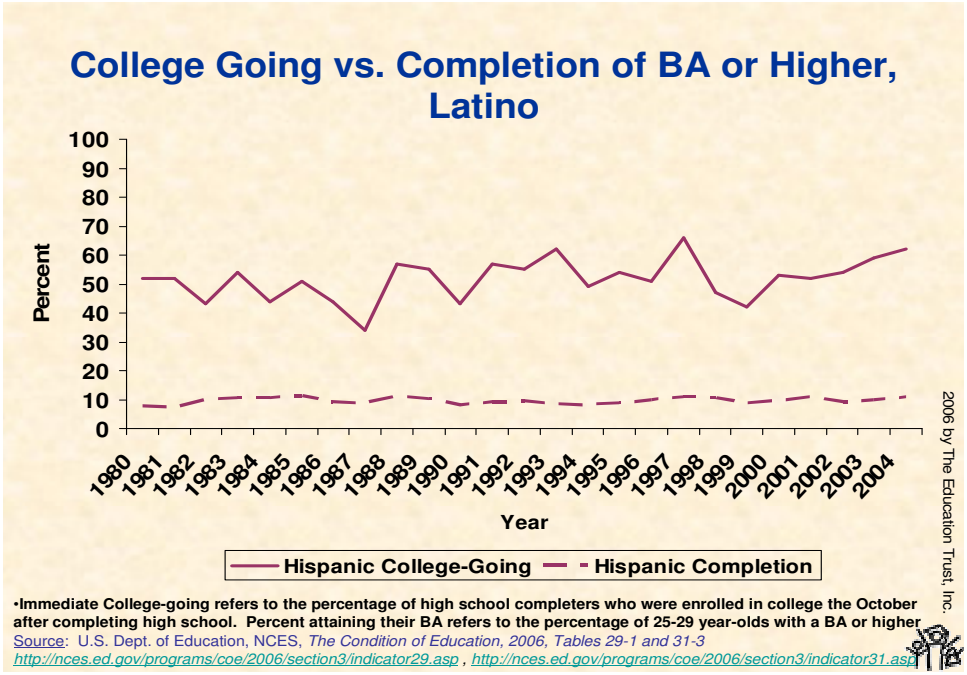
The following graphs provide a visual example of just how stark the achievement gap within higher education is:



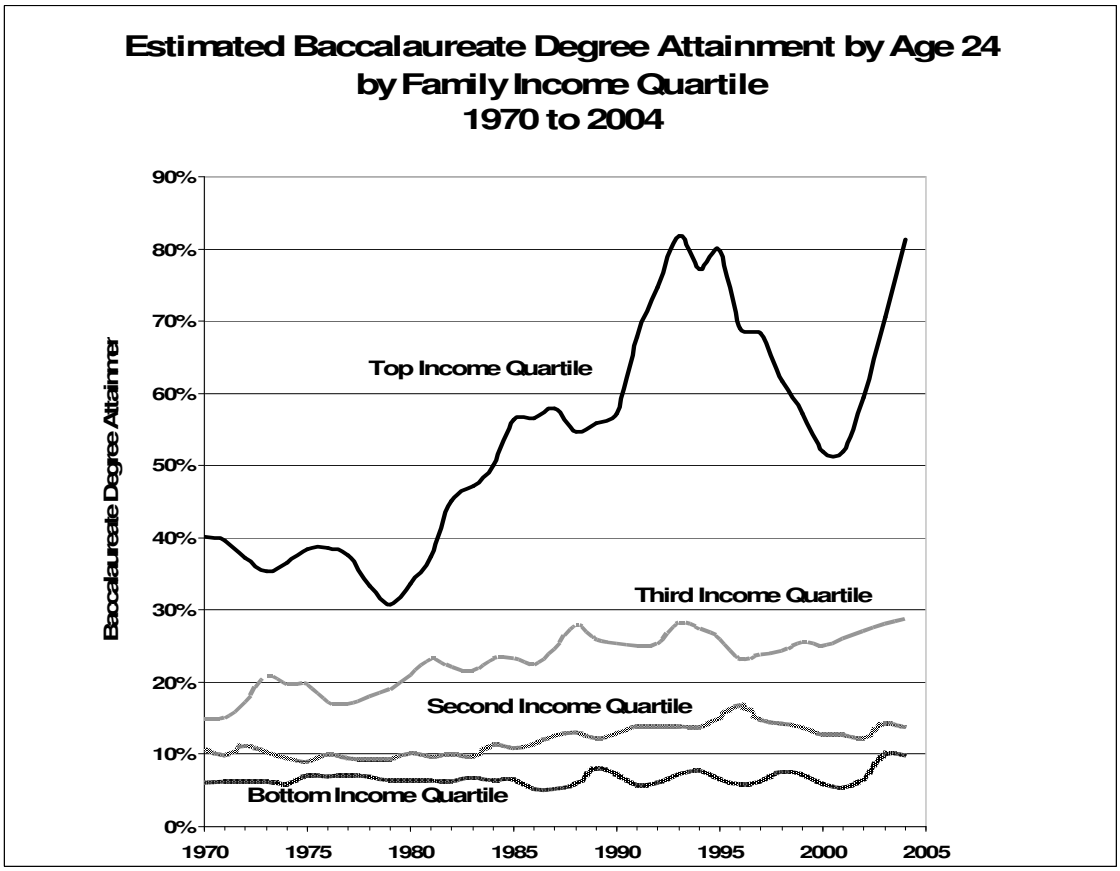
(US Department of Education, NCES, 2006a)



(U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2006b)



(U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2006c)



(Data for chart from Mortenson, 2005)

The explanations for such low attainment rates are many and varied. Research emphasizes academic under-preparation (Adelman, 1999), racial tensions on college campuses (Rendon & Hope, 1996), students struggling to live on the margins of two cultures (London, 1992), alienation from campus communities (Tinto, 1987), and inadequate financial aid (Mumpers, 1996; Paulsen & St. John, 2002). How have small schools fared in helping their students to navigate these and other obstacles and, ultimately, to beat the odds?

This dissertation seeks to answer this very question, and more broadly to understand what happens when public schools take seriously the possibility embedded within them to create more just and equitable outcomes for low-income students of color. By looking closely at one small urban public high school and the subsequent experiences of its graduates in higher education, this study further untangles the complexity of the work of small schools, makes transparent the power and limits of small school reform, speaks to the mediating role schools can play in the on-going struggle for social justice, and illuminates what more needs to happen – within higher education and socio-economic policy – for the work of small schools to be *enough*.

The Research

Given the vision of institutional agency embodied in small public schools, coupled with the realities of higher education for low-income students of color, exploring what happens to small school graduates as they move beyond high school is critical to understanding the power and limits of this reform movement. The question for small school educators, and others interested in the potential roles schools play in mediating social reproduction, is to what degree and how small school graduates are

equipped to navigate higher education. Is what their schools have struggled so hard to give them *enough*?

Through primarily qualitative and ethnographic methods, this dissertation explores this issue by addressing the following questions:

1) How does one small urban public school structure teaching and learning to help *all* students to persist through high school and be prepared for college?

2) How do students' secondary experiences shape the expectations of schooling, skills, and values they take with them to college?

3) What happens when students move from a small urban public school to post-secondary settings, and how does this illuminate the power and the limits of small schools and the policies and practices of higher education?

The study focuses on the work of one small public high school in New York City, referred to throughout as Bridges, [8] which serves an academically-unscreened population of primarily low-income students of color, and on its graduates' experiences with college. It depicts what takes place inside of Bridges, in order to understand how it redefines schooling and how it conceptualizes and operationalizes its vision of college-for-all; it presents the voices of upwards of 100 graduates about both their anticipations of college and their achievements and struggles within college; and it closely follows the experiences of six of Bridges 2002 graduates– Charles, Niki, Malik, Maria, Teresa and Wesley – moving with them from the end of their senior year of high school through their first three post-secondary years. In particular, the experiences of these six graduates depict the way in which the dreams of small schools – and the dreams of their graduates – are both realized and deferred as students move out of high school and through college. The work of Bridges and the experiences of its graduates offer a new window into the

[8] The names of the school, staff members, students, and graduates have all been changed.

complexity of the work of small schools as well as the overriding power and limits of small school reform.

Related Literature

This study seeks to contribute to three specific bodies of literature: research on small schools, research on persistence through higher education, and reproduction and resistance theory. While much of the research from the first two bodies of literature is woven throughout the dissertation to contextualize and explain the ethnographic data, the larger contributions the study hopes to make to them are outlined below. With regards to the third, reproduction and resistance theory, the notion of institutional agency is further defined in this section, explaining both how it is rooted in existing literature and how it advances that literature.

Small Schools Literature

Research on small schools has been abundant, particularly with recent funding initiatives from high-profile foundations;[9] however, despite small schools' – and foundations' – goal of college for all, little of this research has been done around graduates' persistence through higher education (Davidson, 2006b). To date there have been only two studies on small school graduates in college, both limited in scope.

"Learning to Think Well: Central Park East Secondary School Graduates Reflect on Their High School and College Experiences" (Bensman, 1995) provides insight into the adjustments small school graduates have to make to a different approach to teaching and

[9] See: National Evaluation of High School Transformation: American Institutes for Research and SRI International. (2004). Executive Summary: Evaluation of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's High School Grants, 2001-2004 http://www.gatesfoundation.org/nr/Downloads/ed/evaluation/Year%203%20Final%20Reports/Exec%20Summary.pdf. And Rubenstein, M. et al. (2005). New Century High Schools: Evaluation Findings from the 2nd Year. Washington DC: Policy Studies Associates. http://www.policystudies.com/studies/school/Second%20Year%20Report%209-9-05.pdf

learning in college. However, it relies exclusively on one-time interviews with graduates, does not quantify persistence rates, and does not address the role of higher education in students' transitions.

"Keeping Accountability Systems Accountable" (Foote, 2006) is a college transcript study which tracks a sample of graduates across 20 small New York City public schools for their first year and a half out of high school. This study provides evidence that small school graduates have higher persistence rates in college than national averages: 84% of the small school graduates attending four-year colleges returned for a second year in comparison to 73% nationwide, and 59% of small school graduates attending two-year colleges returned for a second year in comparison to 56% nationwide. While an important indicator of the success of small schools, because this study solely focuses on transcripts and is not longitudinal, it provides little insight into either the reasons for persistence or the on-going obstacles students face.

With the limited research that has been done on graduates of small schools in college, a primary goal of small urban public school reform remains under-researched. Jay Feldman, Director of Research for the Coalition of Essential Schools national office, comments on the need for more research and highlights the importance of it being longitudinal. "Longitudinal studies are the gold standard in research that actually provides relevant information to schools," he argues. "When you just take a slice of data as opposed to following students over time, the slice gives you information, but it doesn't show you the changes that people experience." (Davidson, 2006b, p.10)[10]

[10] Feldman is currently conducting a longitudinal study with graduates across CES (Coalition of Essential Schools) schools, collecting transcripts and monitoring student progress. Ultimately he aims to conduct an even more comprehensive study, stating, "We'd like to do a study in the spirit of the Eight Year Study and

Persistence through Higher Education

With the population of Americans who attend college growing and the importance of a college degree increasing, research has grown in the areas of college preparation and college persistence. Given low persistence and attainments rates within higher education, the two literatures have begun to come together to advocate for a K-16 pipeline (Conley, 2003; Hodgekinson, 1999; Kirst & Venezia, 2004; Knight, 2003; Timpane, 1998) in the hopes of improving the odds for more college students. Most frequently stressed is the disconnect that exists between high school and college standards (Conley, 2003), as illustrated primarily through a lack of alignment between high school exit exams and college entrance exams. As such, the major thrust of policy recommendations has been on aligning high school exit exams with the standards and expectations of higher education (American Diploma Project, 2004; Abraham, 1987; Conley, 2003; Kirst & Venezia, 2004; Venezia et al, 2003).

The problem with this approach is that, on the one hand, there is a lack of consensus within higher education regarding what actually constitutes "college-level work" (Abraham, 1987, 1986), and, on the other, the resulting policy recommendations predominantly attribute lack of persistence to academic under-preparation on the part of the high school (Arnold, 1995). While high schools have a very real part to play in preparing students for the academic rigors of college as well as other obstacles students may face, the system of higher education that graduates move into also bears responsibility. Some academics (Aronowitz, 2000; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Brint & Karabel, 1989; Levine, 1986; McPherson & Schapiro, 1999) have highlighted that higher

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really track students' social, leadership, and intellectual experiences in in-depth ways that you can't get by looking at transcripts." (Davidson, 2006b, p.11)

education is too stratified along race and class lines, while others (Hurtado et al, 1996; Levine and Nidiffer, 1996; Rendon and Hope, 1996; Steele, 1999; Weis, 1985) have pointed to problematic practices and structures within colleges.

In addition to pointing the finger at how high schools or higher education need to change, there is also an emphasis in the literature on how students themselves need to *adapt* to college. Tinto's (1987) seminal study on persistence in college concluded that a primary indicator of student success in college is the degree to which students integrate onto college campuses. This integration can either be through interaction with faculty and student organizations (Kraemer, 1997; Mayo et al, 1995; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Tinto, 1987) or contact with other students and social organizations (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979; Padilla et al, 2002; Richardson & Skinner, 1992). While these findings may be accurate, they send the message that low-income students of color are expected to adapt to the seemingly-fixed and dominant culture in higher education, or in other words "commit cultural suicide" (Tierney, 1992), and they can imply that colleges are exempt from responsibility for changing to better meet their students' needs.[11]

This dissertation hopes to speak back to and advance current explanations for low persistence rates among low-income students of color, shedding further light on both low college retention rates and the disjuncture between high school and college. While the existing literature is vast, there is a need for studies that more explicitly link high school and college experiences and ones that look more holistically at the college-going process.

[11] Some researchers have challenged this perspective, shifting partial blame to institutions of higher education themselves and holding them accountable. These researchers (Gonzalez, 1998; Steele, 1992; Rendon, 1992; Tierney, 1992) contend that colleges need to transform their culture to adapt to the diversity of students now on their campuses. Rather than universities solely expecting students to socially integrate, they need to make a greater commitment to diversity through their students, faculty, and classroom and non-classroom practices (Vining-Brown, 1996; Rendon, 1992). These ideas will be further explored in Chapter 7.

As this study is both longitudinal and ethnographic, looking at the paths students travel from high school to college, it provides a needed and different window into the achievement gap in higher education – one that reveals more about the shortcomings of secondary schools, the policy and practices of higher education, and social policy affecting low-income communities.

Reproduction and Resistance Theory

The literature on reproduction and resistance theories in education has grown steadily since Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis published *Schooling in Capitalist America* in 1976 in which they argued that rather than embody the values of meritocracy, schools were structured mostly to meet the needs of a hierarchical, and inherently unequal, economy. They wrote,

> We believe the available evidence indicates that the pattern of social relationships fostered in schools is hardly irrational or accidental…the structure of the educational experience is admirably suited to nurturing attitudes and behavior consonant with participation in the labor force. (p. 9)

Unless the basic economic structure of society is called into question, and in turn reformed, they asserted, schools will never achieve their social democratic functions.

Several theorists have built upon Bowles and Gintis' theory of reproduction, writing about the ways in which schools act as agents of cultural and ideological hegemony (Apple, 1990; Giroux, 2001), build upon the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1973) of the elite, prepare students for differing roles in the capitalist system (Anyon, 1980; Carnoy & Levin, 1985), and prevent low-status youth from developing both the cultural and social capital (Coleman, 1988; Stanton-Salazar, 2001) they need to achieve mobility. Furthermore, empirical researchers (see Anyon, 1980; Cookson & Persell, 1985; Fine, 1991; Fordham, 1996; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999; Walkerdine et al, 2001;

Weis, 1985) illustrate the ways in which reproductive processes play out in practice, illuminating how schools are indeed structured to further perpetuate class, race, ethnic, and gender inequality.

Even among those who agree fundamentally with reproduction theory, however, there has been a voice of critique that centers mostly on its overly deterministic nature. Where, after all, is the room for human agency? As presented, reproduction theory suggests that young people follow blindly, making their moves in accordance with the larger forces of capitalism without exercising any thought, critique or decision-making in their life course. As Giroux argues,

> The separation of human agency and structural analysis either suppresses the significance of individual autonomy or ignores the structural determinants that lie outside the immediate experience of human actors. (in MacLeod, 1995, p. 21)

In turn, a literature of agency and resistance has evolved. Much of this literature positions young people who act in "oppositional" ways (Apple, 1995; Giroux, 2001; MacLeod, 1995; Ogbu & Gibson, 1991; Willis, 1977) – who conduct their lives in disregard for the rules of school and the larger society – as embodying resistance. These theorists suggest that the actions of oppositional youth may be responses to their own political understanding and critique of the system rather than laziness, individual pathology, or learned helplessness.

A critical notion that is often misrepresented in the resistance literature is that students are not opposing or resisting *education*, but rather *schooling*, as it is traditionally defined and structured within the United States (Valenzuela, 1999). Partly in response, others have written about a different form of resistance, one more closely tied to education for critical consciousness (Fordham, 1996; hooks, 1994; O'Connor, 1997).

Resistance within this construct also presupposes the ability to critique society and its expectations, but individuals commit themselves to intellectual endeavors as a display of resistance. Hooks (1994) captures this notion in talking about her own experiences growing up in the segregated south, "We learned early that our devotion to learning, to a life of the mind, was a counter-hegemonic act, a fundamental way to resist every strategy of white racist colonization" (p. 2)

Largely absent in the resistance literature is the fact that while students can enact agency, so too can schools. As Freire argues, "If education is not the key to social transformation, neither is it simply meant to reproduce the dominant ideology" (Freire, 1998, p.110). Just as young people need not proceed willingly into pre-determined roles without questioning the status quo, schools need not either. And though the gross majority of them do, assuming they have little power to change either the grammar of schooling (Tyack & Cuban, 1995) or its accompanying inequitable outcomes, others use their agency. Such institutions engage, at times, in the rule-breaking behavior of oppositional behavior but only in an effort to position academic success for low-income students of color as a means of resistance. These schools enact institutional agency by moving their political and social critique of traditional schooling into action through redefining the "core of educational practice" (Elmore, 1996). Though on its own their work will not ameliorate the achievement gap, it can act as a critical lever in a collaborative effort towards social change.

Some resistance theorists have spoken to the mediating roles schools can play – Aronowitz and Giroux (1993) call them "democratic public spheres" and Fine and Weis (2001) "counterpublics" – but there are few empirical studies that illustrate this. There are

many examples of schools acting as agents of reproduction (Anyon, 1997; Fine, 1991; Kozol, 1991; Oakes, 1985; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999), but what happens when a school takes seriously the goal of educating all of its students for academic achievement, develops positive student-teacher and student-student relationships, creates dialogue around intellectual issues, engages students in processes of inquiry, fosters student voice, and values the cultures of students of color? [12] Until there are more studies depicting schools as mediators of reproduction, the possibility that lies within them as well as their limits will not be fully understood. As Giroux (2001) argues,

> Theories of resistance become useful only when they concretely provide ways in which to articulate knowledge to practical effects mediated by the imperatives of social justice and uphold forms of education capable of expanding the meaning of critical citizenship and the relations of democratic public life. (p. xxiv)

Bowles and Gintis (1976) left their readers with only one option: "We conclude that the creation of an equal and liberating school system requires a revolutionary transformation of economic life." (p. 265) Set within the larger imperfect context of America schools function within limit-situations (Freire, 2002; Martin-Baro, 1994) – no matter how good the practices inside the walls of a school, they will not change, for example, the number of jobs that exist for college graduates, inequitable school funding, health care for the poor, or financial aid policy for college students. Nevertheless, there is power in, and a need for, marginal spaces that work against the grain, and there is a need for qualitative research that looks closely at sites that struggle to do just this.

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[12] Some researchers have looked at the effects of programs that are structured to provide traditionally non-college bound students with an education that will prepare them for college. For example Mehan, Hubbard and Vallanueva (1994) and Stanton-Salazar (2004) have researched the AVID program (Advancement Via Individual Determination), focusing on the ways in which institutional mechanisms positively influence students' ideology about academics. While their findings are important in the conversation about institutional agency, they are not about school-centered reform (Gandara, 2002). Furthermore, as the program's name indicates, the program places more of an emphasis on individual agency than on institutional reform.

Institutional agency in schooling has existed since the earliest days of public education; it is time it be taken seriously and looked at closely by theorists who value notions of resistance to reproductive processes. If such spaces are *not* defined as ones that work against the grain of the larger system, they will be seen by the majority of society, inaccurately, as evidence that if young people could just try harder they could reap the benefits of a meritocracy. Such institutions do not function as part of the system, but rather act against it, and therein lies their success.

Conclusions

Bridges, as an example of one small urban public school that has taken seriously the goal of providing an equitable and just education to its students and, with higher retention rates than city-wide averages, has upwards of 90% of its graduates moving on to college. The success of Bridges faculty's work with students while in high school is testimony to their ability to work through and with the complexity of their vision. What then happens to their graduates as they move through higher education? The rest of this dissertation responds to this – and other questions – by looking inside of Bridges and at the lived experiences of its graduates. The remaining chapters are as follows.

Chapter 2 outlines the research design and approach to data analysis for the study for both the school-based and graduate follow-up research.

Chapter 3 introduces Bridges, the small urban public high school that is the focus of the research. The chapter provides a context for the school through defining its mission, practice, and culture using field notes, student and staff interviews, and school documents. The chapter ends with snapshots of Charles, Niki, Malik, Maria, Teresa and

Wesley – the six graduates followed most closely throughout the dissertation – encapsulating what defined their own experiences at Bridges.

Chapter 4 narrows the focus on Bridges' goal of college for all of its students – revealing the ways in which the school is structured to prepare all students for college and exploring the complexity of this goal by documenting staff and student expectations, anticipations, and concerns about the college experience. The chapter includes snapshots of Charles, Malik, Maria, Niki, Teresa, and Wesley as they prepare to embark on their journeys into college.

Chapter 5 further explores the complexity of college-going for low income students of color by looking at graduates' first year of college. With a focus on Charles, Malik, Maria, Niki, Teresa, and Wesley, but intertwining the experiences of other graduates and survey results, it explores how Bridges graduates fared in college, what shaped their journeys, and how they navigated them. The chapter opens with snapshots of Charles, Malik, Maria, Niki, Teresa, and Wesley documenting where they were in fall 2003 and then follows them through their first year of college, exploring how prepared they were for both the academic and non-academic challenges of college. Among these challenges, the chapter focuses on a shift in approaches to teaching and schooling, finances, and integration into campus communities.

Chapter 6 continues to follow Bridges graduates through their second and third years out of high school. Opening with snapshots of Charles, Niki, Malik, Maria, Teresa, and Wesley in the fall of 2003, it moves on to explore graduates' desires to be in college as well as the challenges to doing so. Specifically, it looks at graduates' self-identified

need to: answer the question of *why college*; define a career direction; transfer into a new college and/or to get back into higher education after having stopped-out.

Chapter 7 pulls together the work of Bridges and its graduates' experiences to offer conclusions about the power and limits of small schools, and presents implications to small schools, institutions of higher education, and the socio-political-economic contexts within which young people attend schools. It includes closing snapshots of where Charles, Niki, Malik, Maria, Teresa, and Wesley were three years after having graduated from Bridges.

Chapter 8 is an *Afterward* that looks closely at my own experiences conducting this study – both as a researcher and an educator – in order to address critical questions embedded within qualitative methods.

Chapter 2

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a multi-method approach to data collection, with a focus on ethnographic (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1998) and generally qualitative research methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998), to understand the power and limits of small school reform as seen through the post-secondary experiences of graduates. There are several components to the research design, each described in detail below, which together represent a multi-sited (Marcus, 1998) and longitudinal (Weis, 2004) ethnography using "extended case method" (Burawoy, 1991). The study examined one school and then followed participants over time and across settings to document their micro-experiences in order to explain macro-educational trends. The variety of data sources collected allowed for the investigation of several spaces: the work of one small school and student experiences within it; the holistic post-secondary experiences of graduates; the connections between small school reform and the system of higher education; the landscape of post-secondary education and higher-education policy; and the effects of political and socio-economic realities on the work of schools and the experiences of low-income students of color. Together the resulting analyses speak to the work of small schools, the structures and practices of higher education, socio-economic policy within the United States and its effects on educational achievement, and ultimately the role of public schools as mediators in social reproduction.

The guiding research question for the study is: to what extent and in what ways do students' secondary school experiences at a small, urban, public school influence their

expectations for and navigation of higher education? More specifically the research questions are:

1) How does one small urban public school structure teaching and learning to help *all* students to persist through high school and be prepared for college?

2) How do students' secondary experiences shape the expectations of schooling, skills, and values they take with them to college?

3) What happens when students move from a small urban public school to post-secondary settings, and how does this illuminate the power and the limits of small schools and the policies and practices of higher education?

Research Design

The research for this dissertation can best be described in two parts*:* an ethnographic school-based study and a graduate follow-up study.

Ethnographic School-Based Study

In order to document and analyze the work of small schools, this study focused on one small public high school, Bridges. Research within this school included semi-structured interviews (Bogden & Biklen, 1992) with staff members and high school students;[13] collection and analysis of school documents; and participant observation (Atkinson & Hamersley, 1998; Burawoy, 1991; Lareau & Schultz, 1996) within classrooms, staff meetings, student presentations, communal spaces (e.g. library, hallways, main office), and school events. Together, the components of the ethnographic school based study served as a foundation from which to understand graduates' post-secondary experiences.

[13] All interviews and focus groups were tape recorded and professionally transcribed; I reviewed and corrected all transcripts.

School Site Selection: Bridges was chosen for a variety of reasons, including its vision, number of years in existence, student population and achievement rates.

Located in New York City, Bridges opened in 1992 with a 7th grade class and became a 7-12 school with slightly over 500 students in 1998. When the study began in 2002, the school had graduated five cohorts of students. Its population is typical of New York City public schools: upwards of 80% qualify for free lunch, 26% for special education services;[14] 60% are Latino, 28% African American, 6 % Asian, and 6% white.[15] There are no admissions requirements to enter; in fact over 50% of Bridges' students are randomly assigned to the school. For those who apply, there is no examination of test scores, nor are essays or interviews required.[16] When students enter the school in 7th grade their test scores are, in fact, below district and city-wide averages.[17] Bridges' funding is also comparable to other similarly populated city high schools leaving it equally as under-resourced by the school system as other urban high

[14] Bridges has a larger population of special education than most other New York City public schools; in comparison, only 13% of the neighborhood comprehensive school is classified as special education. Bridges' population of special education students breaks down as follows: 60% fall into a CTT (Collaborative Team Teaching) model whereby students are integrated into general education classes with the full-time support of a special education teacher who assists in adapting and modifying curriculum and instruction; 35% fall into a SETSS (Special Education Teacher Support Services) model whereby students are integrated into general education classrooms but receive specially designed and/or supplemental instruction through pull-out and push-in services by a special education teacher; and 5% fall into the Special Class model whereby they are integrated into general education classes but have a para-professional with them at all times to modify curriculum and assist in coursework. (Definitions of classifications derived from Hehir et al, 2005.)

[15] All data on Bridges is from New York City Department of Education School Report Card, 2003.

[16] Attendance records of the students admitted through this process are considered but are not used as definitive indicators of acceptance or rejection.

[17] Of the 7th grade students entering Bridges in 2003, 18.3% scored at Level One (lowest performing level) on the English Language Arts 6th grade standardized test, in comparison to 15.6% district-wide and 22.6 city-wide; 58.5% scored at Level Two, in comparison to 50.9% district-wide and 47.8% city-wide; 22% scored at Level Three, in comparison to 30.7% district-wide and 26.6% city-wide; and 0% scored at Level Four in comparison to 2.8% district-wide and 3% city-wide. In regards to the 6th grade math standardized test, 30.5% of Bridges 7th grade students entering in 2003 scored at Level One, in comparison to 30.9% district-wide and 27.5% city-wide; 48.8% scored at Level Two, in comparison to 34.6% district-wide and 41.5% city-wide; 18.3% scored at Level Three, in comparison to 20% district-wide and 21.2% city-wide; and 3.7% scored at Level Four, in comparison to 14.5% district-wide and 9.8% city-wide.

schools. [18] Despite these realities, Bridges statistically outperforms its traditional school counterparts: 85.5% of students who were 9th graders at Bridges in fall 2000 graduated by September 2004,[19] while city-wide only 50.2% of 9th graders from fall 2000 had graduated.[20]

Reflecting the importance of researchers being some part of the world(s) they are researching (Fine, 1994b; Whyte, 1996), Bridges was also chosen because I had previously worked there for seven years.[21] This connection facilitated access to both the school and its graduates; staff saw me as connected to or a part of the school community and graduates had an association with me that created both a basis of trust and an incentive to return phone calls. Furthermore it was particularly important to me, as a white woman from an upper middle-class background doing research primarily with low-income students of color, to share one common space with research participants; while the implications of race, ethnicity and class differences (Anderson, 1993) were still present, I believe having been a part of the same school community, and having previously established a foundation of trust, mitigated them. There are, of course, concerns that come along with being connected to a research site – mostly regarding the way in which the relationship influences what gets shared by research participants, observations, and resulting analyses. As such, participant observation was a key component of both the ethnographic school-based study and the graduate follow-up

[18] Bridges does have a corporate sponsor to supplement its programming which it has used, primarily, to hire a college counselor. Additionally it has a Beacon program on site which provides some after-school recreational, educational, and employment opportunities for students.
[19] An additional 11.3% of the original 9th graders were still enrolled.
[20] An additional 29.9% of the original 9th graders were still enrolled.
[21] I taught at Bridges full-time from 1995-2001 and mentored one new teacher, through a Department of Education mentoring program, on a part-time basis for the 2001-2002 academic year. By the time I began research in late-June 2002 I had no formal connections to the school or to the students I would ultimately follow. As such, there were no ethical issues of power and authority regarding my role as a researcher.

study; it allowed me challenge my own assumptions and understandings about Bridges and its graduates in order to arrive at an informed analysis of the school and move beyond graduates' own narrations of their experiences.

Sampling: The primary goal in choosing staff members to interview, documents to review, and places to observe at the school was to capture a comprehensive view of the site. In total ten staff members were interviewed, who together represented a range of years working at the school, a variety of disciplines, and the general demographics of the staff (See Appendix A). Documents reviewed and analyzed included teacher-research studies that had previously been conducted at the school, school brochures, Department of Education data, and other relevant materials generated by Bridges between 1992 and 2005; observations were varied and included twelve different classrooms, seven staff meetings/retreats, five student presentations, a series of student and staff committee meetings, and one graduation ceremony (See Appendix A).[22]

Graduate Follow-Up Study

The graduate follow-up study had three components, the most central of which were the "go-alongs" (Kusenbach, 2003): a longitudinal ethnographic study following six students for three years after their high school graduation. My underlying premise was to be a naturalistic researcher (Bogden & Biklen, 1992), bringing myself into the worlds of my participants to observe their journeys over time and thus develop a more nuanced view of their experiences than interviews alone would allow for. The go-alongs entailed: conducting both semi-structured and unstructured longitudinal interviews (Phelps et al,

[22] With regards to the participant observation, having conducted many graduate interviews already, I used these interviews to inform the selection of spaces I would observe – spaces which would further my understanding of how school structures and practices lead to the values and skills graduates themselves highlighted as having developed while at Bridges.

2002; Weis, 2004) (ten interviews per student[23]); visiting students on their college campuses and attending classes with them; collecting course syllabi and assignments; emailing and talking on the phone on a regular basis; and interviewing their families before they began college.[24] In order to broaden the data base, compare experiences, and establish trends, single-interviews, focus groups, site visits, and a phone survey were also conducted with a larger sample of Bridges graduates. The phone survey, in addition to providing more information of graduates' experiences with the high school to college transition, provided a means to ascertain statistics about graduates college attendance and persistence.

Sampling for Go-Alongs: In selecting participants for the cohort study purposeful sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) was used, prioritizing the diversity of types of colleges students would attend,[25] as well as the race/ethnic and gender composition of the group. Using a list of schools where seniors planned to attend college, a proposed group of students for the study was developed and then presented to the 12th grade teachers for their feedback. Also considered in final selection was students' responsiveness, as this would be critical for participants to have in a longitudinal ethnographic study.

With the aim of having 6-8 students in the cohort and after solidifying a list of nine potential students to follow, seniors were approached individually. The project was explained to them, and they were asked if they were interested and willing to participate.

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[23] Because of variation in participants' experiences, there were a total of eleven interviews for one student and eight for another.

[24] There were two students in the cohort for whom I was unable to interview a parent; one graduate's mother was undergoing treatment for breast cancer, and the other began college a semester late due to a variety of issues which made it difficult to schedule a parent interview.

[25] In addition to types of colleges students would attend, I also aimed to find one or two students who would be participating in one of New York State's Opportunity Programs (HEOP, EOP, and SEEK) that admit students with test scores and/or grades below admissions requirements and whose family income is below a set amount. Students in these programs receive academic support, financial support, advising, and attend a summer transition program.

Those who agreed to participate were given an IRB-approved permission slip and a written contract detailing expectations of participants. [26] The contract also indicated that students would receive a $150 stipend, at least for the first year.[27]

Of the students approached, two were unwilling to participate. One was concerned about his workload for the coming year, particularly because he would be at a private competitive college and a part of the HEOP[28] program which included a summer session and additional advisement meetings during the academic year. The other was unsure of whether he would begin college in the fall. The initial seven-member cohort was as follows:[29]

- Niki: African American female planned to attend a "competitive"[30] private college on Long Island. 76% of the student population at the college is White, 11% African-American, 9% Latino, and 4% Asian/Pacific-Islander, and 37% persist to graduation.

- Wesley: African American male planned to attend a "very competitive" private college on Long Island. 63% of student population at the college is white, 17%

[26] The contract asked graduates to agree to: conduct a taped interview before beginning college and four follow-up interviews throughout the course of their first year; maintain regular email/phone contact; share syllabi and course assignments; receive one or two visits from me during the course of their first year; and consent to an interview between me and a parent/guardian (with the help of a fluent Spanish-speaker in the event of a language barrier).

[27] Providing a stipend to participants was possible because of funding from the Spencer Foundation Discipline Based Studies in Education program at the CUNY Graduate Center. During the second year of research I continued to provide a stipend through funding I received from a Spencer-AERA pre-dissertation fellowship.

[28] HEOP and SEEK are Opportunity Programs in New York State that admit students with test scores and/or grades below general admissions requirements and whose family income is below a set amount. Students in these programs receive academic support, financial support, advising, and attend a summer transition program.

[29] All statistics on colleges – race/ethnicity breakdowns and graduation rates – are from the colleges' websites, Barron's *Profiles on American Colleges* (2005), or from personal correspondence with a representative at the college. It is worth noting that finding the race/ethnic breakdown of student populations was far easier for some institutions than others. Generally speaking, it was most difficult to find this information for the more competitive private colleges than for any others. For one college, in particular, I was transferred four times – including to an admissions officer and the director of advising both of whom did not have the information.

[30] Rankings are taken from Barron's *Profiles of American Colleges* (2005). These rankings do not reflect the academic standards of these colleges or the quality of education they offer, but rather are determined based upon four factors: ACT/SAT scores of Freshmen, high school class ranking of Freshmen, minimum class rank and GPA requirements for admissions, and percentage of applicants to the Freshman class who are admitted to the college.

African-American, 12.6% Hispanic, 6.5% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 53% of students persist to graduation.

- Teresa: Latina planned to attend a "very competitive" four-year CUNY through SEEK program. 26% of the student population at the college is Asian/Pacific Islander, 26% White, 20% Hispanic, 17% African-American, and 53% persist to graduation.

- Maria: Latina female planned to attend a "most competitive" private college in Connecticut. 72.6% of the student population at the college is White, 4.0% African-American, 5.0% Latino, 4.6% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 83% persist to graduation.

- Charles: African-American/Latino male planned to attend a "competitive" private college in New York City through HEOP program. 55.7% of the student population at the college is White,[31] 4% African-American, 5.2% Latino, 3.7% Asian, and 85% persist to graduation.

- Malik: African-American male planned to attend a "less competitive"[32] 2/4 year SUNY. 81% of the student population at the college is White, 10.8% African-American, 6.2% Latino, 1.7% Asian/Pacific-Islander, 36% receive a degree or certificate within four years.

- Christina: Latina planned to attend a "non-competitive" two-year CUNY. 41% of the student population at the college is African-American, 31.3% Latino, 11.5% Asian/Pacific-Islander, 8.6% White, 7.3% Other, and 27.2% graduate within six years.[33]

While the cohort began with seven students, and pre-college interviews were conducted with all seven and with family members of five of them, one participant, Christina, was dropped in the fall. This decision arose from the fact that the graduate who was supposed to attend a four-year CUNY, Teresa, for reasons described in Chapter Five, ended up attending the same two-year CUNY as Christina. Given that two Latina females

[31] The race/ethnic identification of 28.6% of students at this college is "Unreported" or "Other".
[32] While Barron's did not rank this particular college, I have used the "less competitive" ranking based on the ranking of a SUNY with similar entrance requirements.
[33] This graduation rate includes students who received an Associates degree (20.9%) plus those who also received a Baccalaureate degree (6.3%) within six years.

would now be attending the same college the decision was made to follow only Teresa who originally intended to go to the four-year CUNY.[34]

While the first year of research with each cohort member included a similar time line and research components, the research trajectories diverged as the years progressed and graduates' lives took different courses. Appendix B outlines the research trajectories of each go-along.

Sampling for Individual Interviews and Focus Groups: Graduates for this series of interviews and focus groups were selected using purposeful sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003), prioritizing the representation of a range of institutions and a balance of graduates who were still in college and ones who had "stopped-out" (Horn, 1998). [35] Graduates were identified through questionnaires completed at a series of Bridges reunions. Of the graduates approached, all were willing to participate. Interviews and focus groups were conducted on college campuses and at Bridges. In total nine semi-structured interviews and two focus groups (with a total of eight graduates) were conducted representing eight different post-secondary institutions (See Appendix C).

Sampling for Survey: Participants for the phone survey were identified through both random (Bogdan & Bicklen, 2003) and snowball (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999) sampling. The first set of participants was identified through a Bridges alumni event held in June 2003 where a voluntary survey, which included closed and open-ended questions, was administered. Though fifty-five students across four graduating classes (1999-2003)

[34] I stayed in peripheral contact with Christina, both directly and indirectly as she was close friends with Teresa and they attended the same college. I also interviewed her once at the beginning of her second year out of high school.

[35] The term "stop-out" is used by Horn (1998) because in exploring persistence through college she found that, while nearly 30% of those students who began college in 1989-1990 left postsecondary education before starting their second year , 64% of those who left 4-year colleges returned within five years and 50% of those who left two-year colleges did. In my own research, almost all graduates surveyed or interviewed who had only left college for a period of time planned to return within a year.

completed it, in talking with graduates before, during and after the survey, and in looking at the completed surveys themselves, it was clear that many misunderstood several of the questions and/or rushed through so they could, understandably, get back to socializing with former classmates and teachers. Because of these conditions, this set of surveys was discounted, but the contact information graduates had provided on their surveys was used to conduct a phone survey.

While the disadvantage of a phone survey was that graduates would not be anonymous, most had voluntarily put their names on the written survey at the reunion. Furthermore, there were several advantages: the results would be more accurate as questions were presented orally to participants and necessary clarifications made; graduates were not rushed; and a larger pool of respondents could be generated by getting other graduates' contact information from those surveyed.

During the summers of 2004 and 2005 I conducted the phone survey with 90 graduates, spanning three graduating classes (1999, 2000, and 2001)[36] and representing 55% of those graduating classes.[37] Graduates were asked for their consent in being surveyed, assured that information would be confidential, and phone surveys were tape-recorded and transcribed. None of the graduates reached by phone refused to complete the survey, though there were some who did not return calls when messages were left.[38] The sample was composed of the following:

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[36] I chose not to survey the graduating class of 1998 because, as the first graduating class of the school, I was not confident that they would be representative of those that followed; and, while I began with the intention of surveying graduates of the class of 2002, once I started it was clear that having only been out of high school for two years they were unable to answer several of the questions sufficiently.

[37] After two-thirds of the surveys had been completed, I shortened the survey and included only questions that were closed-ended. I made this choice because I had collected ample qualitative data and wanted to make sure to gather a large sample for the quantitative analysis.

[38] While it is possible some graduates did not return calls because they did not wish to share their experiences, when I tracked down one who had not returned calls and who would never talk when I did

Class of 1999	Class of 2000	Class of 2001	Male	Female
35	25	30	41	49

Latino[39]	African-American	Caribbean-American	Asian	White	First-Generation American	Primary Language Spoken at Home not English[40]
63%	27%	2%	4%	2%	14%	58%

Putting It All Together: Triangulation of Data

The use of multiple methods was intended to add "rigor, breadth, and depth" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998) to the study. Having three to four data sources for each research question (see chart below) allowed for triangulation (Janesick, 1998) in data analysis. In particular, multiple sources of data were critical in defining and explaining trends across graduates.

Conceptual Question	Operational Question	Method(s)	Sample: Site/Students
How does one small urban public school structure teaching and learning to help all students persist through high school and be prepared for college?	How does Bridges re-define "school" through its structures and practices for all students?	1. Participant Observation 2. Interviews 3. Document analysis	1. School site 2. Staff (10) 3. Current and past school documents

call, I learned it was because I often called when minutes on her cell phone plan were not free. As they were only free when she was working, she could never call back. This was an important indicator of the ways in which financial strains influence participation.

[39] While there are several ways in which the experiences of Latino and African-American students are shaped differently because of culturally-related differences, I generally have not separated these groups out in my analysis. Within the context of the go-alongs some of these differences – and their effects on students' trajectories – do emerge. However, I chose not to treat them differently in the more general analysis primarily because the central unit of analysis is the high school, and the high school tends not to treat these populations differently within their approach to schooling.

[40] 33% of these respondents reported that both English and another language were spoken at home.

Conceptual Question	Operational Question	Method(s)	Sample: Site/Students
What expectations of schooling, values, and academic skills do students develop at this small urban public school to take with them to college?	What are the goals of Bridges – particularly in relation to college – and how is college define by both staff and students?	1. Interviews and Focus-Groups 2. Go-Alongs 3. Document Analysis 4. Phone Survey	1. H.S. students (5) Graduates (20) 2. Go-Alongs (6) 3. Portfolios of work of cohort 4. Graduates (90)
What happens when students move from this small, urban public school to other settings? How do their experiences speak to the power and the limits of small school reform?	What do graduates experience when they move out of this high school? In what ways are their expectations of college met or not? How do their post-secondary decisions reflect their high school experiences?	1. Interviews and Focus Groups 2. Go-Alongs 3. Phone Survey 4. Document analysis	1. Graduates (20)[41] 2. Go-Alongs (6) 3. Graduates (90) 4. Course syllabi and assignments

Data Analysis

Having collected a wealth of data from different sources, analysis took place in varied ways. Throughout the course of the study writing was used as a tool for analysis (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994), mostly through written research memos to work through observations and determine directions for the research. For the ethnographic school-based study, all of the data was reviewed, categories and themes were generated, and data was coded.[42] Transcripts from graduate interviews and survey transcripts were also reviewed to define common characteristics graduates cited with regards to their secondary school experiences.

[41] Focus groups were also conducted at a series of reunions held by the school, which were both tape-recorded and transcribed. Approximately 70 graduates attended these reunions. These transcripts were reviewed as well.

[42] Examples of categories for coding included: expectations of students, definitions of "college" and "college-prep", approaches to teaching.

For the graduate follow-up study, data from the go-alongs were continually reviewed in preparation for upcoming meetings, and formal reviews of the data were conducted several times over the course of the three years. These reviews entailed reading and re-reading transcripts and field notes, looking across interviews and field notes, identifying a host of categories, and coding these documents for common themes that emerged.[43] The same was done with the individual interviews and focus groups.

A struggle throughout the study with regards to analyzing the go-alongs was whether to look across the participants' experiences or within them. Using Wilkinson's (2000) notion of coupling content and biographical analyses, both were done. Having looked first across the data at the end of the first and second years of data collection, participants' data was reviewed on an individual basis after the third year. For each graduate in the go-alongs, an accordion file was kept containing all interview transcripts, field notes, emails, course syllabi, graduate writing, etc.; and a document was created for each participant summarizing chronologically their experiences. After completing a set of summary notes for each participant (15-35 pages each), a one page document was written for each participant outlining the major themes that emerged from their experiences. Finally, these one-page documents were compared to identify themes that had emerged for all six of the participants. While each participant's experience differed in substance, the overall categories were generally consistent. Next individual interviews and focus groups were reviewed again to establish themes from those sources, which were then compared to the themes that had emerged across the participants in the cohort study. They were also generally consistent.

[43] Examples of categories for coding included: descriptions /critique of pedagogy, financial obstacles, role of professors, accomplishments, family issues, issues related to race and ethnicity, agency.

Analysis of the surveys was both qualitative and quantitative. Survey transcripts were reviewed to identify what graduates consistently said about Bridges, and to make note of anomalous statements/experiences. These findings were compared to the aforementioned list of themes that emerged from the cohort study, individual interviews, and focus groups. This triangulation helped to responsibly generalize the findings of the cohort study. In terms of quantitative analysis, statistics were calculated on college graduation rates, persistence rates, and transfer rates, with attention paid to disaggregating the data across race and ethnicity as well as type of college attended.

Self as Researcher

Susan Krieger (1996), in writing about her experiences doing ethnographic research in a community of which she had previously been a part, highlights the critical importance of researchers exploring the personal process they undergo when doing research. Who we are as researchers deeply influences both the research process and the resulting analysis. Furthermore, as doing research can be a transformative process for both the researcher and participants, taking account of the development and changes in perspective on both sides is itself an important aspect of the analysis. As such, I have included at the end of the dissertation an *Afterward* exploring my role as both a researcher and educator throughout this study. The intention is not only to make transparent my own research process and give the reader insight into my analyses, but also to further a discussion raised throughout the dissertation on the dynamics that evolve around race and class differences between students and staff.

Before proceeding with the dissertation, however, it is important to make clear my beliefs about research, and the position from which I came to it, since both have

influenced the choices I made throughout my process of data collection and analysis. My stance as a researcher evolved out of my experiences as a small school educator. I became a teacher – and specifically involved in small school reform – because of my belief in the underlying power of schools as tools for achieving social justice and my understanding of the mission of New York City's small schools to make urban education more equitable and just. As a teacher I worked primarily with juniors and seniors and therefore spent a lot of time both helping students to apply to college and then hearing, anecdotally, about their experiences once there. My interactions with students and graduates raised a host of questions for me about the practice of small schools and the realities of higher education. My ability to answer those questions was limited, however, in part because my own background and that of most of my colleagues differed greatly from that of my students. As such, I entered graduate school with a burning desire to better understand what constituted graduates' post-secondary experiences and what led many to stop-out.

Additionally, while a classroom teacher, I was engaged for several years in action-research, conducting studies to advance change at the school. This work fostered a set of beliefs about research that I brought with me to graduate school and that have traveled with me since: research should be done with, not on, communities and individuals; research should be useful to the community and individuals; and research processes should be transformative for both participants and the researcher alike.

It is because of these beliefs that, in addition to contributing to academic literature and conversations around reproduction and resistance theory, small school reform, and persistence in higher education, I have also moved forward an action agenda (Alford,

1998). This has included making formal and informal presentations at Bridges about my research and findings; using my research to inform professional development work with new small schools; and helping to develop a high school-to-college transition program for small schools in New York City through the Institute for Urban Education at Eugene Lang College, New School University. Additionally, over the course of three years of research I acted as a necessary resource to those graduates who participated in the go-alongs, and others I interviewed for the graduate follow-up study. The advising I gave was only in response to graduates who asked for guidance. While intervention is always a question within research, it was my belief that I had a responsibility, as a researcher and an educator, to my participants. Records were kept of all interventions and considered and discussed in analysis.

Issues related to both the methodological approach of this study, and my role as a researcher within it, are further addressed within the *Afterward*.

Chapter 3

BRIDGES:
THE HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

Achievement and Opportunity in Urban Public High Schools

Bridges Graduation, June 25th 2004 (field notes)

57 students, predominately Latino and African-American, stand tall in their blue and white graduation gowns before a cheering crowd. Their 12th grade literature teacher, who also taught them humanities in 9th and 11th grades, welcomes everyone in both Spanish and English and delivers a speech that he jokes about having revised three times, just as students' assignments were expected to be throughout high school. He presents students' own words from reflective pieces they wrote: "Bridges has been like my second home for four years;" "What makes Bridges special is the warmth of the community where everyone is helping each other;" "Bridges has meant a lot to me because of the way the school is structured…teachers care for students and are there whenever you need extra help." Then he observes, "What these students recognize is that community doesn't just happen because people are in the same place. Community has to be built on purpose. At Bridges we have built community through small classes, advisory, group work, close relationships with parents, after school help… And it is not just one community: each class, each grade, the whole school, the neighborhood, your families, are all inter-connected communities. And you are part of a community of small schools – a movement that is spreading." His advice to them as they take their next step: "Wherever you are next year, build community for yourself…Get to know your professors and co-workers. Make friends. Join a political organization. Do community service. Study in groups. Spend time with your families. And keep in touch with your Bridges friends and teachers."

There is no valedictorian; rather all graduates are invited to speak. Fifteen choose to. Among them are special education students, students with straight A's bound for competitive colleges, students who struggled to get C's, males, females, Latinos and African Americans. Their words underscore the themes their literature teacher addressed: community, relationships, academic rigor, and the importance of speaking up.

…

It is a long graduation – lasting over three hours –despite the small size of the graduating class. It is a metaphor. The school takes its time educating those students it has. It thinks about each one deeply, wanting to recognize their individual strengths. No one is anonymous. No one walks away without saying good-bye. Over 90% move on to their next step: college.

Michelle Fine (1991) opened *Framing Dropouts* with the following scene from graduation at a large public school in New York City she called Comprehensive High School:

> *The auditorium at Hunter College is filled with girls in white dresses; boys in suits. Heads typically adorned with walkmen, sweatshirt hoods, bandanas, nylon stocking caps are now shielded by caps, bodies covered in gowns. No 'I love (or don't love) – High School' buttons; no hallway threats of expulsion. Smiles, hugs, grandmothers from Georgia, Puerto Rico, and Dominican Republic. Mothers, fathers, uncles, little brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews. The room smells of pride. In many cases the first in their families is about to receive a high school diploma.*
>
> *They line the stage – principals, administrators, counselors, teachers and some parents, representatives of the Parents' Association. Most white. The auditorium is filled. Most Black. The lights of cameras flicker.*
>
> *Awards are presented for feats ranging from academic success in each discipline (including special education) to perfect attendance.*
>
> *Principal: Our valedictorian [a Black woman] makes us very proud. She has been granted a total of $96,000 in scholarships to study medicine at Haverford College.*
>
> *The entire auditorium – the graduating class, families and friends – roared. On their feet with collective pride.*
>
> *I counted the graduating class: a total of 200. In a school of approximately 3,200 I fantasize a moment of silence for the nearly 70 percent of students who began ninth grade four years ago and who haven't, and won't, graduate.* (p. 1)

There are several similarities between these two scenes, and more broadly these two schools. Though Bridges is smaller in size (516 students grades 7-12), as both have no admissions requirements their student populations are similar in regards to race, ethnicity, class, and educational achievement upon entering the school.[44] Bridges and Comprehensive High School are also afforded the same per pupil expenditure and thus they face similar struggles resulting from inadequate funding, [45] among them: ill-equipped science labs, small pools of qualified teacher-candidates particularly in math

[44] The breakdown of Bridges' population, as noted in Chapter 2, is: upwards of 80% qualify for free lunch, 26% for special education services, 60% are Latino, 28% African-American, 6% Asian, and 6% White.
[45] The only exception to this is that Bridges, like many other schools, has a corporate sponsor which primarily funds a college counselor.

and science, and limited support services for students.[46] Bridges and Comprehensive High School also boast similarly high college-going rates among graduates – Bridges' is 90% and Comprehensive High School's is 80%.[47]

The differences between these graduation scenes, and more broadly these schools, however, extend beyond the similarities. Firstly, though Bridges' population is similar to schools like Comprehensive High School, its attendance rates are higher:[48] 88.4% in comparison to 74.9%.[49] Secondly, while the two schools report similar college-going rates among graduates, the percentage of students who persist through high school grades 9 through 12 is starkly different. While upwards of 80% of those students who began 9th grade at Bridges four years earlier stood at graduation, only 30% of those who entered Comprehensive High School four years earlier did. This difference is representative of city-wide trends: 85.5% of students who were 9th graders at Bridges in fall 2000 graduated by September 2004,[50] while city-wide only 50.2% had.[51] Taking this comparison one step further, while college-going rates are one indicator of success, college persistence rates are another; Bridges outperforms comprehensive high schools in this category as well. For every one-hundred students who begin 9th grade at a comprehensive high school, 67 finish within four years, 38 go to college, and 18 earn an Associates degree within three years or a Bachelors degree within six years (Mortenson, 2000). In comparison, for every ninety students who began Bridges in 9th grade 77 finish

[46] In certain respects small schools have a disadvantage over large schools in the area of funding. While per pupil expenditure is the same, with fewer students, small schools work with smaller overall school budgets which affects the range of courses and non-academic programs they can offer.
[47] College-going rates come from school report cards and are reported by the schools themselves based on college acceptance rates and planned attendance.
[48] All data on Bridges is from New York City Department of Education School Report Card, 2003.
[49] This comparison number is taken from the school report card of a neighboring comprehensive high school from the same year.
[50] An additional 11.3% of the original 9th graders were still enrolled.
[51] An additional 29.9% of the original 9th graders were still enrolled.

within four years, 72 go on to college, and 48 earn an associates or bachelors within five or six years. [52]

Looking beyond and beneath the statistics the differences between Bridges and Comprehensive High School, as representative of large urban schools, run far deeper. In many respects Bridges' teaching staff is distinct from most urban comprehensive high schools. Nationwide, 27% of teachers in high poverty public schools teach outside of their area of certification (National Commission for Teaching and America's Future, 1996);[53] 20% have three or fewer years of teaching experience (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2000); and in New York City 72% of teachers hold Masters degrees. At Bridges 98% teach within their area of certification; average teaching experience is nine years;[54] 85% hold Masters degrees; and over 50% attended the country's "most competitive" colleges.[55] At the same time, the Bridges teaching staff is typical of urban schools in its demographic make-up (Fine, 1991; Pflaum & Abramson, 1990). While the student population at the school is predominately students of color, the staff has not been reflective of the same backgrounds. In 1997-1998 – the school's first year with a full student body and staff – 69% of the academic teachers and administrators were White, 13% Latino, 9% African-American, and 9% Asian. By 2003-2004 it had become only slightly more diverse: 70% White, 13% Latino, 11% African-American, and 6% Asian. Overall, the commitment of both teachers and administrators at Bridges is what sets it apart from typical images of urban public school teachers working within the

[52] Other than the high school graduation rate, this data comes from my own research; it is out of ninety as the total number of graduates surveyed was ninety.
[53] High-poverty schools are defined as those where more than 49% of the students qualify for free-lunch; at Bridges upwards of 80% do.
[54] In the school's initial years, faculty had far fewer years experience; the majority having zero-two years experience when they began.
[55] These colleges were named "most competitive" in Barron's *Profiles on American Colleges* (2005).

boundaries of Union contracts. Often without additional compensation, teachers arrive early, stay late, take on roles that fall outside of their job description, and generally devote numerous hours outside of school to communicating with parents, preparing curriculum, and grading student work.

Alongside the differences in teaching staff, the structures and practices that define students' and teachers' experiences at Bridges are distinct from those of most comprehensive high schools and, in part, explain the achievement gaps between the two. In her portrayal of Comprehensive High School, Fine (1991) depicts a school marked by the silencing of student voice, discouragement of critical thinking, and an explicit avoidance of topics related to racism, classism, and homosexuality. She also makes transparent how Comprehensive High School's approach to education disempowers teachers in ways that, in turn, disempower students – the staff is given no authority to choose class texts, design curriculum, or shape school policy. Fine argues, "Disempowered teachers are unlikely to create democratic communities inside their classrooms, but are more likely to move toward silencing." (p. 140) The result is that more often than not teachers become defeatist, blaming students and school bureaucracy for their inability to change the odds for the gross majority of their students. One teacher in her study explained, "My job is like a pilot on a highjacked plane…to throw off the highjackers and save the passengers." (p. 156)

Though researched in the late 1980s, more recent research confirms that Comprehensive High School is still typical of urban schools. Most are structured to minimize the possibility for relationships between students and teachers (Stanton-Salazar, 2001); prepare young people for differentiated futures (Education Trust, 2001; Oakes,

1985); subtract cultural and social capital from students (Valenzuela, 1999); "bank" students with knowledge (Freire, 2002) using instructional methods that run counter to Black and Latino cultural practices (Nieto, 2000; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999); disempower teachers in ways that, in turn, disempower students (Darling-Hammond, 2001); and deprive students space to develop their voices (McCormick, 2004). Valenzuela concludes in her ethnography of a school serving primarily Mexican-American students that it is designed for student failure. She argues,

> Rather than functioning as a conduit for the American dream, this large, over-crowded, urban school reproduces Mexican youth as a monolingual, English-speaking, ethnic minority, neither identified with Mexico nor equipped to function competently in America's mainstream…it divests these youth of important social and cultural resources, leaving them progressively vulnerable to academic failure. (p. 3)

The result is an achievement gap – or rather an "opportunity gap" (Fine et al, 2004) – that marks the failures of public education in the United States. 63% of Latinos and 81% of African-Americans graduate high school, in comparison to 90% of Whites and 94% of Asians (Education Trust, 2001). Moreoever, 35% of Latinos and 43% of African-Americans are enrolled in college-preparatory tracks in comparison to 50% of Whites and 56% of Asians (Education Trust, 1999).

The higher achievement levels of Bridges students are the result of the school's distinct practices, policies, and culture. In its commitment to institutional agency, Bridges has redefined "schooling," rejecting traditional approaches to education and designing new ones in an effort towards democratic practice. For example it has mixed-ability classrooms, block scheduling, integrated curriculum,[56] an advisory system, small student-

[56] Bridges began by integrating history and English, as well as math and science. As the school developed, however, it decided to separate the instruction of math and science, believing that it was difficult to maintain the rigor of each discipline throughout high school with an integrated approach.

loads for teachers,[57] a system of performance-based assessment, and scheduled time for teacher collaboration – for curriculum planning, discussion of individual students, cross-grade planning, and policy setting. The culture and values that ensue can be seen throughout the school: all students' voices matter; academic rigor and relationships are paramount; teachers are treated as intellectuals; students' cultures are reflected in curriculum and practice; educators work in spite of bureaucratic problems and the socio-economic realities of students' lives; and ultimately the school is committed to viewing no student as a highjacker to be thrown off the plane – all are expected to complete high school and attend college.

Bridges teachers and administrators continually demonstrate a belief in the need for and importance of positive, engaging, and rigorous academic experiences similar to those afforded to students in the best private schools; however the struggle to do this in an under-resourced setting for all of their students, many of whom enter with skills well below grade-level, raises challenging dilemmas. Among these dilemmas: How can their students develop as scientists without state-of-the-art, or even adequate, science laboratories? How can they challenge their highest achieving students while meeting the needs of their lowest achieving ones? How can teachers devote the time and energy needed to prepare their students for rigorous performance-based assessments while contending with the pressures of state-mandated standardized exams? How can the staff understand and address the varying and multiple needs – academic, social, and emotional – of their students given both limited resources and the cultural, race, and class

[57] While many schools focus on small class size, Bridges recognizes that it is not only small class size but also reducing the overall number of students taught throughout the week that is important to personalized learning. As such, overall loads range from 40-80 students, with math and science teachers having the higher numbers of students.

differences between themselves and their students? How much support should the school give its students to enable them to get through high school, and how much support is too much with regards to preparing them for the independence they will need in college?

A glimpse into Bridges – its mission and practices – reveals the power of this work, but woven throughout are also the difficulties of doing it on a day to day basis, given the odds the students and the educators are up against.

The Vision

Maxine Cohen, founding principal of Bridges, started the school in 1992 in hopes of creating an educational environment that offered something radically different from the traditional public school where she first taught but similar to the progressive private school she herself attended, a school where she enjoyed supportive relationships with teachers, learned to use her mind well, and never wanted to miss a day. When Cohen began her career as a special education teacher at a large comprehensive school, she felt as though she were working in the building on her own: she was not introduced at her first staff meeting; when problems arose, she was told to deal with them on her own; and she did her lesson planning in partnership with a curriculum guide. No one spoke about the students or their curriculum, and no one had any idea of what was happening outside of their own room. As such, she explains, "What I was good in – which wasn't much – I stayed good in and never improved on my weaknesses."

It was not until Cohen became too frustrated to remain at this school, concerned she was merely "contributing to a racist system," and began teaching in a small school that she came to realize what teaching *could* be. She explained,

> I immediately became a part of a group of thoughtful folks who were always talking about their practice, about kids' learning…The principal always gave us interesting stuff to read, teachers welcomed me in their classroom. I felt like I was home. Now I could be a proud teacher…I was learning.

The principal of that school, having also been educated at a progressive private school, sought to offer similar educational experiences to low-income students of color to those she herself had. The result, as Cohen explained, was that students were respected, intellectually engaged, and developed the knowledge and skills they ultimately needed to move on to higher education.

After working at this small school for seven years, Cohen was convinced there needed to be more opportunities like this for students from underserved communities. Along with two other colleagues from her first small school, she opened Bridges in a neighborhood in Manhattan where students were being disserved by the local high school. The original vision of the school, as written in 1992, read:

> We are dedicated to the proposition that all students can learn, and it is the school's sacred responsibility to create an environment in which that will happen. The goals for all students are to:

- Develop a habit of critical thinking, questioning and reflection on work, understand problems in a more complex way, and imagine alternative solutions.
- Demonstrate understanding of evidence, viewpoint and make connections between theory and practice.
- Recognize that individuals can have an impact, experience a sense of accomplishment, explore career options take pride in work, and see themselves as lifetime learners.
- Strengthen the ethic of social and civic responsibility, understand the needs and services of the community, understand systems, and be a contributing member of the community.
- Learn how to work independently and collaboratively, as a participant and observer.
- Enhance respect for others and appreciation of cultural diversity.[58]

[58] The mission statement has been revised over time and currently reads: Bridges is committed to creating an environment where students and families feel comfortable and supported. Small classes and a personalized approach to learning ensure that all students are not only challenged, but prepared to meet the

From Vision to Practice

The Setting

A walk around Bridges begins to reveal the ways in which the school's vision is institutionalized in practice and how, even on the outside, it is different from a typical urban high school. As Nieto (2000) describes,

> It is not unusual in poor urban areas to find schools with police officers standing guard. In some, students are frisked before entering. Teachers sometimes feel afraid unless they lock their classrooms. In many schools desks are nailed to the ground; halls and classrooms are airless and poorly lit; and shattered glass can be found in courtyards where children play. Add the lack of relevant and culturally appropriate pictures, posters, and other instructional materials as well as the lifelessness and institutional colors of green and gray on the walls, and we are left with environments that are scarcely inviting centers of learning. (p. 102)

Though set in a building that dates back to 1924 with metal bars outside of its windows, Bridges has done much to create a more positive setting for its students. It shares a building with two other schools, occupying two-and-a-half of the five floors and sharing several spaces: a library the size of two classrooms serving students from all three schools, grades 6-12; a gym with ceilings too low for a standard basketball game; and a lobby which doubles as the cafeteria. While there is a banner welcoming visitors to Bridges in the lobby, the real entry-way to the school is on the second floor, where teachers, students, and visitors are greeted by a bulletin board featuring posters of colleges, seniors' acceptance letters to a variety of schools, and informational posters about how to pay for college. The expectation of college for all and the effort to create a "college-going school culture" (Oakes et. al, 2004) is immediately clear.

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high expectations and standards that they will face in school and life. Our school is for students, families and teachers who are willing to participate in a partnership dedicated to academic excellence, non-violence, racial, gender, class, sexual orientation and ethnic equality, and responsibility to one's community.

Walking through the halls, the school's commitment to student voice, critical thinking, and social justice are also clear. Student work covers bulletin boards featuring the types of assignments students are asked to do: position papers on whether the U.S. should be at war in Iraq, student-designed math problems on linear inequalities, "additional" chapters to *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Framed cases display the "Habits of Mind" teachers use to guide instruction:

> *Viewpoint: From whose viewpoint or perspective are we seeing, reading or hearing? Are there other ways to interpret this? Evidence: How do we know what we know?; Relevance: Why is this important?; How are things, events or people connected to each other?; Supposition: What if…? Could things be otherwise*?

Students' paintings about social issues are displayed: one sends a message about the under-financing of urban public schools, another calls for equal pay for women and a third, written in Spanish and English, is a statement about racial injustice. Posters made by the school's Anti-Bias Squad show both the importance of student leadership in the school and its commitment to challenging discrimination. One reads: "Anti-racism, sexism, ageism, religious prejudice, homophobia, bullying. Everything the AB Squad stands for," and another "If everyone is thinking alike, someone isn't thinking."

The principal's office further embodies the school's values of academic engagement and relationships. Outside is a bulletin board for the Principal's Book Club listing all of the books they have read together; inside one wall is lined with photos of former students and teachers, another with books for teachers, and another with books for students. The books for students are categorized by subject like "mystery," "teen fiction," "spotlight on Latino authors," "spotlight on African American authors," "social justice." There is a table in the center for conferences among staff, with families, and between students and staff.

What one does not see is just as powerful as what one does: no metal detectors at the entrance, no security guards stationed on each floor, no bulletin boards listing test scores, no students hiding in stairwells.

Nieto (2000) highlights the significance of the messages communicated through a setting like Bridges',

> If students are perceived to be 'deficient' then the educational environment will reflect a no-nonsense, back-to-basics, drill orientation. However, if they are perceived as intelligent and motivated young people with an interest in the world around them, then the educational environment will tend to reflect an intellectually stimulating and academically challenging orientation, a place where learning is considered joyful rather than tedious. (p. 103)

The Classes

Education in urban public schools is more often than not depicted as an anti-intellectual endeavor where students spend more time resisting academic achievement than engaging in it. Fine (1991) captured a too-typical and telling scene at Comprehensive High School:

> *Teacher:* Right now you can't give opinions. I noticed you, Andrea, and others, have a tendency to answer questions based on what you believe. It's a problem. They don't give a damn what you think on Citywides and other tests…Andrea, let's read.
> *Andrea:* I don't feel like reading.
> *Teacher:* I don't feel like giving you a passing grade. (pp. 37-38)

Bridges classrooms capture a very different reality than those observed by Fine (1991) and others (Anyon, 1997; Fordham, 1996; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999), despite the struggles teachers face related to students' skill levels, work habits, and socio-emotional issues, as well as external pressures with which they contend. A glimpse into a few of Bridges classrooms follows.

In a 10th grade humanities class, students are embroiled in a debate on a resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Half represent Israelis and the other half Palestinians. Both groups sit surrounded by notes, books and handouts. The "Palestinians" talk about Israel's violations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the "Israelis" challenge the Palestinians about their refusal to accept the Balfour Agreement. Students deliver opening and closing statements, cite texts, ask questions and respond to one another. Occasionally the teacher intervenes – raising questions about how Zionism or the Six Day War plays into the debate. When class ends several students leave the room continuing the debate. The teacher, though she believes the students did well, is disappointed that they did not show deeper understanding and refer more readily to critical historical events. She attributes this to the fact that they were unable to spend ample time on the topic because of the upcoming state-mandated Regents exams. While the students take a separate test-prep class, an effort to preserve the integrity of the humanities curriculum, the closer the exam date came the more pressure she felt to divert more time and attention to it.

In an 11th grade non-tracked math class, students sit in pairs working through problems about parabolas and checking one another's work: "She didn't square that, that's the problem." "What's the parabola?" "Is this supposed to be -29?" They mark one another's papers. Occasionally there are exclamations of success – "I did it! I am smart!" – and at other times cries of frustration – "I have the wrong answer!" Their teacher walks around the room checking in on students and answering their questions. At one point he steps outside to speak with a student who arrived late and immediately put her head down on the table. He finds out she is distressed because of a serious family issue, but through

a one-on-one dialogue, he is able to get her to turn her attention to her work, at least for the rest of the period. Two students work individually, the rest in pairs or threes. Some struggle and barely complete the assignment while others finish quickly and begin reading novels. They move into a whole class discussion about one problem the teacher has projected onto the wall; students discuss the steps they took as their teacher guides them with great excitement – all but three students participate. When the class solves the problem, the students burst into applause.

In an 11th grade chemistry class, students sit in groups at large tables and begin the lab of the day. They put on their lab coats and goggles and assemble their materials: pieces of different metals, hydrochloric acid, and matches. The teacher chose the experiment because the school's lab facilities and equipment function on a "shoestring budget" – the 9th and 11th grade science rooms have one sink, in comparison to state of the art labs that have one per table; the 10th grade science room has none;[59] there are limited numbers of microscopes to share among the science classes and generally limited laboratory equipment.[60] The students get to work on the experiment. At one table a student explains to his group members that the reaction they are seeing is an *exothermic* one and represents *ionic bonding*. Impressed they offer him a round of cheers. He responds, "I am going to go to college and be like – professor, I can explain that!" The teacher bounces from group to group to monitor students' progress, challenges them with questions, and then facilitates a group discussion during which the majority of students participate. The teacher then moves into a review in preparation for an upcoming test.

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[59] In further indication of how limited budgets affect practice, efforts to reduce class size at the lower grades where focused literacy development is deemed critical have resulted in there being no 12th grade science teacher.

[60] All science teachers highlighted the severity of the problem of limited resources in both individual interviews and science team meetings.

Though it was announced several days before, some students are surprised to learn there is a test that week. He also hands back an old test, highlighting that those students who stayed for the after-school review session got at least an 80 and he tells those who did not do well that they can redo their test if they stay after school to make it up. The teacher questions whether offering the make-up test is the right thing to do. On the one hand, he wants students, above all, to master the material, but, on the other he wonders how many chances are too many for second-semester juniors who will begin college in under two years.

These classroom scenes capture two very real realities at Bridges: many students are engaged in intellectually-driven activities and discussions – *they are learning*; and yet at the same time, there is a constant flow of challenges to teachers, students, and the school as a whole, in creating and maintaining this work.

Portfolios and Graduation Committees

As the country, and New York in particular, has been overtaken by preparing students for high-stakes standardized tests, often at the expense of other educational goals (McNeil, 2000; Medina & Neill, 1990), Bridges has maintained its original commitment to using multiple forms of assessment for promotion and graduation. While New York City has a mandated testing regime of five exams, Bridges, along with a host of other small schools that make up the New York Performance Standards Consortium, have taken an active stand against it. Believing such tests are barriers to democratic practices and ultimately a disservice to low-income students of color (Foote, 2006; McNeil, 2000; Medina, N. & Neill, M., 1990; Neill et al, 2004), many small schools opened with a waiver exempting them from the tests. When the state refused to renew the waiver in

2000, the New York Performance Standards Consortium was formed to regain it. While a variance was eventually awarded (after the school-based part of this study was conducted),[61] Bridges had to administer all of the state-mandated tests between 2001 and 2004.

Despite the changing requirements and added stress on both students and teachers, Bridges never stopped using a system of performance-based assessment. Twice a year, in all subjects, students are required to create a portfolio, complete a written reflection, and present their work in roundtable formats – 3-4 students with 2-3 adults.[62] Additionally, in their senior year students complete performance-assessment tasks and present them to graduation committees[63] in the format most commonly associated with a dissertation defense.[64] Maintaining this system has been difficult because of the increasing time demands of the state-mandated exams coupled with the complexity of doing performance assessment with an academically heterogeneous population of students; yet Bridges is sure that the added efforts are critical. As the principal explained, in a letter to participants of both roundtables and graduation committees,

> For most schools throughout New York State the end of the year is a time where student learning is being assessed through state-sponsored standardized tests… At Bridges we believe that learning cannot be sufficiently demonstrated within the confines of tests. This means that our students and teachers are challenged daily not only to prepare for tests, but also to read, write, think, share, explore, solve, create,

[61] In 2005 the Consortium was granted a variance from the State allowing Consortium schools to administer only the English Language Arts Regents and to add one additional Regents exam for students entering high school in 2006. Students entering in 2008 will be required to take two exams and those entering in 2009 to take all five. The Consortium is continuing its fight in hopes of changing the conditions of the variance. For more information go to http://www.performanceassessment.org/.

[62] Roundtable participants include Bridges staff, staff from collaborating organizations, student teachers, and educators from other schools.

[63] Committees are made up of educators from both within and outside of the school.

[64] When Bridges graduated its first class of students, seniors were required to do a performance task in all subject areas. This policy has changed over the years as different state-mandated tests were phased in and out. At the time of this research, there were graduation committees in social studies only, as students were taking Regents exams in all subject areas; however, since the variance was awarded, the school has made a commitment to reinstitute committees in other subject areas.

> collaborate, present, question, defend, negotiate, compromise, and, most importantly, reflect upon themselves as learners… Most students would be too scared to expose themselves to the public like this and most teachers too nervous to "put it all out there." …This is not an easy thing to do. Our students' work and our own work is not always as pretty as we want it to be. And no matter how hard they have worked and we have worked, we are never quite satisfied. However, we offer it to the public because it is to the public that we and our students are ultimately accountable.

A glance at the roundtables and graduation committees illustrates the principal's words.

In a 9th grade math roundtable, Juan, an ESL and special education student, reads his reflective piece: he likes projects because he often freezes during tests; he has grown a lot as a student; he is especially thankful to his teacher for pushing him. There are several grammatical errors and it is short. Standing at an overhead projector he then explains a project he did and two sample test problems, demonstrating general understanding but stumbling over math vocabulary. Valencia then presents her work. Her reflective letter is several pages and begins: "I am extremely proud of the work in this folder because it shows how I went from getting [Fs] to As in less than five months." New to Bridges, she explains that she began to understand math in this class in ways she never had before. Her presentation of how she used the Pythagorean Theorem to construct a stable antenna for a rooftop is evidence of her mastery. Their teacher congratulates them. Valencia is proud, and her teacher and the other roundtable participants are nothing but confident in her mastery of the material. Juan, on the other hand, is disappointed. His teacher reassures him – it was his first presentation, next time he'll be calmer. If Juan can work to compensate for his disabilities, his teacher explains, he believes he has the potential to be stronger than many others in the class. Without such compensation, however, the question of college-readiness – even for a 9th grader – looms large.

In a 10th grade humanities presentation, portfolios of work clutter the tables, and there is a lively hum of voices around the room. A handout summarizes the course: a study of the Rwandan genocide, the Arab-Israeli conflict, World War II, and South African Apartheid. Another handout presents the "essential questions" (Sizer, T., 1992; Wiggins & McTighe, 2006) guiding the class: *What breeds oppression? How can the violation of human rights be resisted? What responsibility do we have to our communities, our society, and ourselves?* As the students reflect on their work, debates that had taken place months before are re-opened: Was the United States justified in dropping atomic bombs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki? How guilty were by-standers during the Holocaust? One student talks about her struggles with reading, admitting she only read about five books independently over the course of the year while another recounts the upwards of 25 she read. One student talks about the importance of activism and another about the memorial he constructed to the victims of Hiroshima. Some present a focused critique of the class and others of themselves. At the end the teacher closes the session: "Congratulate yourself on your success but you should also approach each experience with a beginner's mind. Do not wait for a teacher to start your process of inquiry."[65]

In a 12th grade senior graduation committee, Yahaira presents her history research paper. In order to graduate she, along with all of her classmates, had to choose a topic of interest, research it with primary and secondary sources, and present it. While many high school seniors throughout the country are struck by "senioritis" by Spring term (Sizer, N.,

[65] A fire-alarm went off in the middle of the roundtable. While many students often jump at the chance to leave the classroom for a fire drill, and hope that an alarm is not a false one pulled by a student in the building, this was not the case here. At the roundtable I was sitting at, one student immediately commented, "No – not unless it's a real fire." No student moved from their seats to leave the room and it turned out the alarm was false.

2002), Bridges seniors work hard in class and after school to complete a scholarly research paper and prepare for their committee. Topics range from U.S. foreign policy in Latin America, to the Civil Rights Movement, to the Women's Suffrage Movement, to the Vietnam War. Some students need more help than others, but all are expected to complete the paper. A set of field notes from a visit to a 12th grade history class illustrates this.

> *I look around the room: those students who are conferencing with [a teacher[66]] are deeply engaged, some are working well on their own, but there are others who seem to be doing nothing. When I ask them what they are doing they say they are waiting for help. The student-teacher tells me how hard this is: there is so much work to do and some expect you to sit there and go through it all with them; she worries that they don't do things on their own enough. And yet, many who are being asked to do this would not be asked to do it in other settings - this is a hard task for many of them. Should the school give up on the requirement? They have worked hard to scaffold across the grades so students can accomplish it.[67] Won't they need the skills in college? Won't they be better for having done it before once in college – academically and psychologically? But will they be able to do it on their own? (May 20, 2004)*

Despite the difficulties, all but two of the seniors complete the requirement and present to a committee. Yahaira is the first of the seniors to present. She has done roundtables but this is different – she is the only student in the room facing a committee of three adults. As her committee has read her paper in advance, she focuses her presentation on why she chose to study Trujillo's rule in the Dominican Republic – to learn more about her own history – and on the struggles she faced in the research/writing process. She then answers a series of questions: What was the role of the United States? How was US support of Trujillo similar to its support of Bin Laden during the Cold War?

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[66] There are three adults in the room – the 12th grade history teacher, a student-teacher, and the 11th/12th grade special education teacher.

[67] The school worked hard for several years to scaffold research paper skills throughout grades 7-12 so that students would not confront a research paper for the first time in the 12th grade. Unfortunately with the onset of the Regents exams, several of the lower grades have not had the time to include a comprehensive research paper.

What would she advise Bush on foreign policy given what she learned? After over a half an hour of dialogue Yahaira leaves the room and her committee discusses the paper and the presentation. Opinions vary about specifics, but all agree that based on the rubric provided she did an excellent presentation, demonstrated deep understanding, had a well-written paper, but needed to revise her introduction.[68] Yahaira is invited back into the room and given feedback. At the end of the committee, she leaves the room, hugs her friends with relief, and immediately sits down to rework her introduction. Yahaira has no computer at home; she stayed late almost every day during the month of May to complete the paper on-time. She writes a new introduction and circulates it to her committee the next day.

Yahaira's process was not unlike her classmates'. They all were able to explore a topic they were particularly interested in, several studied issues that brought them closer to their families and their own history, each one found the process to be a very challenging one, some were asked to make revisions, and they all believed that it helped to prepare them for what they would face in college. One senior explained:

> It helps you work independently. It helps you open up your mind to…harder stuff. Like you're not going to be just thinking about the easy stuff and put limits on yourself. It's going to help you go past those limits. And you're going to be ready for anything. Because later on...you're not going to have the same teachers. And you're not going to have…[teachers] holding your hand… you're going to have teachers who don't really give a damn about what you do, or like they just want you to do things. So, doing this history paper really…helps you be independent, and helps you open up your mind.

Bridges' system of performance-based assessment reflects the extra distance the school is committed to going to provide the type of accountability they believe to

[68] If any members of the graduation committee rate any of the five categories on the rubric as "needs revision" the student must revise that aspect of the paper even if the other committee members believed it was sufficient.

be most important to college-readiness. It is not only time-consuming to conduct roundtables in all subject areas twice a year and graduation committees for all seniors, it is also, as the principal noted, not easy for both students and teachers to make their work publicly vulnerable to critique. And yet, in hopes of ensuring that all students are prepared for the demands of college, and that they receive a rigorous education, Bridges "put[s] it all out there" time and again.

Staff Development

Staff meetings in public schools are often characterized by a slew of announcements, an occasional outside staff developer talking at teachers, and staff using the time to grade tests and complete paperwork (Lieberman, 1995; Little 2001; Livingston, 1992; National Commission on Teaching & America's Future 1996; Sykes 1990; Wasley 1991). At Bridges, however, a system of professional development has been created to afford and support teachers in a range of professional responsibilities: designing curriculum, setting school-wide policy, and addressing the needs of all of their students. Teachers meet in a variety of teams during the school day and weekly for a 2-hour after school meeting.[69] Grade teams discuss students and develop strategies to address their needs; curriculum teams plan lessons and examine student work for the same disciplines within one grade; department teams develop scope and sequences, common approaches to skill-instruction, and best-practices across grades; and the entire staff discusses everything from family involvement to school tone. Most meetings are

[69] While this time commitment exceeds the expectation set out in the Union contract, the staff agreed it was necessary and worked it into their School-Based-Option plan.

planned and facilitated by teachers themselves.[70] A glimpse of a few of Bridges staff meetings follows.

At one meeting staff delve deeply into questions of race, ethnicity and class, setting out to explore more closely how the differences between themselves and their students might affect practice. The Diversity Committee, made up of a handful of staff members, initiated the meeting and three committee representatives developed the agenda. The meeting begins with the staff – teachers, administrators, aids, secretaries, counselors included – reading excerpts from a book titled *Adolescent Worlds* and moving on to discuss the various identities students carry with them that affect their high school experiences. Each person is then assigned a different student and provided with a description which identifies the student's race, ethnic and class background, his/her academic achievement, and aspects of his/her family background. Everyone is asked to think about and present on how their student would do at Bridges. What borders would they need to cross? What enrichments and modifications might they need in order to be successful? Throughout the discussions staff members critically question their own practice, the cultures of their students and their school, and opportunities offered – Do they know enough about their students' lives? How do their expectations of students reveal a certain set of values? Is their practice challenging enough for "advanced" students?

At another meeting the staff is at first broken into department and then grade teams to gather feedback about the ways in which the school is working. Teachers are asked to

[70] A seemingly small gesture which stands for much more, at every staff meeting the school provides food and drinks for teachers – everything from cheese and crackers, to fruit, to chips, to ice cream. In a system where teachers are rarely given such things, providing food to staff members speaks loudly about the extent to which their work and time are valued.

think individually and collectively about what is working well in the areas of school organization/structure, support, professional development and policy and what is not, and to provide recommendations for reform. In the humanities department meeting, where all but one teacher speaks, they generally agree that reading and writing workshop are going well, as are department meetings. But they question whether they are doing enough with their independent reading program, if there is enough articulation between grades, if the amount of social study content being covered is sufficient, and if their recent shift to focus on literacy detracts from history content in ways that depoliticizes their curriculum. They put in requests for more meeting time, feedback on classroom practice, opportunities to meet with other small schools to discuss common struggles, and research on key issues. They also recommend re-allocating the budget to reduce administration by one in order to hire an additional special education teacher exclusively for 12th grade[71] or a high school social worker.[72]

In the 10th grade team meeting, teachers agree that "Kid-Talk" – meetings where teachers case-study struggling students – is going well, but they feel there needs to be more follow-up on recommendations made, and they want support in dealing with several of the issues that arise – academic, family, behavioral, and emotional. They also want help in working more effectively with families and understanding the contexts within which students live. One teacher comments, "We need to learn about the insidiousness of poverty and how it affects students," and wonders aloud how they can teach "possibility" without disaffirming where students come from. Collectively they strategize about how

[71] Because there are only three special education teachers for the high school, one is shared between the 11th and 12th grades.
[72] While there is a high school guidance counselor, there is no high school social worker.

they can schedule in more field trips to further expose students to resources throughout the city that they have little access to.

One other meeting shows how much thought goes into each student. It is mid-June, and the staff is broken into grade teams to help to make plans for the next academic year. The teachers, tired by the long days that lie ahead between Regents and Roundtables, sit down to decide which students should be assigned to which advisors for the following year and how students should be grouped for classes. They discuss whether particular students would benefit more from female or male advisors; which students should be put together and which separated; and how to group students heterogeneously. The discussions make a few things clear: teachers *know* their students – their academic needs as well as their personalities; and they are doing all that they can to set them up for success.

These staff meetings make transparent the professionalized roles teachers are expected to play and begin to illustrate the effects it has on them: they are moved to want to both know and do more, ultimately for the increased achievement of all of their students.

Students' Experiences

Many urban high school students receive a barrage of messages that the education system, their schools, and most of their teachers care little about their academic achievement (Fine, 1991; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999). Students at Bridges, however, emerge with a different set of experiences. Many schools feature educationally-sound mission statements on the walls of the principal's office, but the words don't penetrate beyond a staff meeting, if that. At Bridges the mission and values of the school

are carried by students as they move through, and beyond, their high school experiences. One graduate, who started working at the school, captured this when she explained how she described Bridges to prospective students and their families:

> [T]he classes are really small, so the children get a lot of one-on-one attention. The teachers… they really care, unlike other schools. They really care. They push your child a lot. They actually want to see the kids succeed... We don't often have fights and I think the kids get along pretty well...The teachers try to make sure that the kids are prepared for college as much as they can…And it really feels like this is a community.

Beyond her statements, when surveyed, without being asked directly about their relationships with teachers, 84% of graduates emphasized the importance of such relationships, characterizing their teachers as people who not only cared about their success but also took the time to get to know them and to push them academically. Some did mention that the ways in which their teachers supported them through high school made the transition to generally less-accessible college professors more difficult; but overall they affirmed that the relationships between teachers and students, as well as those among students, created a community that allowed students to be themselves, to get the help they needed academically, and generally to develop "positive help-seeking orientations" (Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

One graduate explained,

> I really felt like my teachers…really cared about me. It was just like, okay, you have to learn it. I'm going to be in your face till you do it…I'm not going to lead you the wrong way…just being able to trust the teacher, which I think a lot of students in regular high schools don't have. Because they don't know their teachers the way that students at Bridges do.

Another graduate emphasized the importance of his teachers knowing him as a student,

> I loved that teachers cared about you, and I loved that if you showed enough of a talent, they were going to help you strengthen it…Bridges teachers came up to me

> and said, "Well, you're Charles and you're from somewhere, and I know you know I'm here, so, let's just try to help you get along."

The experiences of one student, a junior at the school, captured the importance of the accountability teachers have for their students. Having previously gone to a large high school with a freshmen class of 1,000, and a senior class with half of that, she found that when she did not go to school it took awhile for anyone to notice. Furthermore, even when she did go, attendance was all that was needed to pass – "you did not have to do any homework…they didn't care if you knew how to read or not." Comparing this to Bridges, where she evolved into a B student who attended school regularly – despite having to take a bus and two trains to school – she emphasized the importance of small classes and the expectation that you have to do work to succeed.

Within the context of positive relationships with teachers, graduates also recalled how engaged they were in their classes and how important it was that voicing their opinions was not only welcomed, it was encouraged. They learned to work together, to listen to one another, and to use each other to challenge their thinking. They appreciated the opportunities they had to learn about their own history, to explore and question what surrounded them, and to read novels by people of their own background. Ultimately, though frustrated and overwhelmed at points during high school, they also appreciated the rigor of their work. One group of graduates, in reflecting on their high school experiences, recalled a 9th grade debate from over seven years earlier about whether Puerto Rico should be a state, a commonwealth, or an independent country. One blurted out, "Oh! What a day! That was fun because you actually got to *learn*." Another graduate explained, "You can never forget the stuff that you learned at Bridges, because you were learning about it for so long that you [became] a pro at that topic."

Beyond learning the topics, the graduates felt they were challenged to think deeply about them. “Bridges taught me to be a critical thinker,” one graduate explained. “A lot of people are just book smart, and they can’t think outside the realm…They see things one-sided instead of something that’s three-dimensional.” Another took this one step further: “The majority of people at [my college], they have their work, they study it, they do it, and that’s it…we have to question everything…why this or why that?”

Finally, Bridges students also understood and appreciated their teachers’ high expectations for them. One graduate explained, “I think most of the teachers really need to encourage students to go to college. There's not enough teachers out there that do that…I think, at Bridges… all our teachers pretty much encouraged us to take that step.”

* * *

Looking Closely: Niki, Wesley, Teresa, Maria, Charles and Malik in High School

The high school experiences of the six graduates followed most closely throughout this study –Niki, Wesley, Teresa, Maria, Charles and Malik – provide a window not only into who they are as individuals, but also one into the needs of Bridges students and the ways in which Bridges affects students’ educational experiences. Most urban educators who have worked directly with students will recognize the types of students each of them were –some more intellectually curious than others, some more diligent in their work habits than others, and some more involved in the school community than others. Collectively they reflect a larger group of Bridges students, and individually their

passions, strengths and struggles define who they are and ultimately what would travel with them into college. [73]

Niki, an African-American female, entered Bridges as a 9th grade student. A remarkably dedicated student who invited challenge, Niki was an A student throughout high school. Her only C was in 9th grade Spanish due to the fact that the class began at 8:00 a.m., and she had recently been displaced from her home; she was living in a shelter an hour and a half commute from Bridges. Her overall GPA for high school was a 3.7. Niki was always an active participant in class discussions, a diligent student, and a leader in group work. While she struggled with test taking, it was an area in which she steadily improved. Throughout high school Niki was involved in school activities as a member of the student council, a peer tutor, and a counselor in an after-school program for elementary school students. She limited her extra-curricular activities however because she often stayed after school for extra help, had after-school jobs, and took care of three younger siblings. Niki opened her senior year research paper on Vietnamese women soldiers during the Vietnam War with a quote from Le Ly Heyslip's *When Heaven and Earth Change Places*: "A woman may do many things but the first thing God equipped her for is to bring forth and nourish life, and to defend it with warrior strength." In a reflection on her research paper she explained that while she initially thought she was going to give up on her topic and pick a new one, when she came upon this statement it made her wonder why Vietnamese female soldiers were so rarely talked about – and generally why women throughout history were rarely written about. In the conclusion to her paper she wrote, "Everyone should learn from these women's strengths and weaknesses and apply it to their problems. The stories of these women can help them understand how determination and brains can overcome anything." She then offered a recommendation, "If more women were to participate in writing history then there would be more stories of women's struggles allowing today's women to learn from and change patterns with women's rights that keep occurring in our society." This encapsulates Niki's approach to schooling and life – exercising one's voice, critical understanding, and determination are key.

Wesley, an African-American male, began Bridges in the 7th grade and was always equally dedicated to his academics and extra-curricular activities, working to balance the two. A student with a competitive drive who loved to learn new things, he had mostly A's in 9th grade and mostly B's, with a few C's, in 10-12. His overall high school GPA was 3.2. He attributes his decline in grades during 11th grade to the death of his aunt whom he was very close to and who left three children in the care of his grandmother and his own family. His academic skills were always solid, though he had a few weaknesses, particularly with writing and analysis. He worked hard, however, to improve in these areas. Wesley's lower grades were in part a reflection of his inconsistent work habits; he socialized too much in class, did not complete homework on a regular basis, and, though he always handed them in, had a tendency to complete assignments late. Also

[73] While Niki, Wesley, Charles, Teresa, Maria and Malik were not followed throughout high school, I analyzed their narrative report cards from grades 9-12, reviewed portfolios of their work, and looked at their college applications to describe who each one was as a high school student.

contributing to his lower grades was the fact that Wesley generally did not like to admit when he was struggling with his work. He therefore had to be pushed to get extra help. Wesley invested time and energy in extra-curricular activities both in and outside of high school. He was Vice President of Student Council his senior year, a member of the Anti-Bias Squad and the prom committee, a peer mediator, a player on the Varsity basketball team, and active in his church's choir. Incredibly dedicated to going to college, Wesley wrote in his personal statement that he was not afraid to face a challenge and that he saw "education as the gateway to all of the success I can hope and dream for." He concluded, "I'm ready for life and all of its expectations, and I'm going to shout, 'I'M COMING WORLD, AND I'M COMING WITH A BANG!'"

Teresa, a Latina of Dominican descent, also began Bridges in 7th grade and was a generally motivated student who exuded pride with each accomplishment. A B student in Humanities and Science throughout high school, Teresa was more of a C student in math. Her overall high school GPA was 2.9. She was a creative thinker and solid reader, and, while she struggled to organize her ideas in writing and had problems with grammar, she always sought help and worked hard to improve in this area. She often developed strong opinions and worked hard to convince others that she was right, in and outside of classroom debates. Teresa's math grades reflected both a weakness in skills and her difficulties with test-taking. In the beginning of high school, Teresa's work habits were not strong– she did not consistently complete her work and was often too chatty in class, but, as she moved into 11th and 12th grades, she became a more serious and diligent student. By senior year she was curious and passionate about learning new things, embraced new topics and connected them to ones she had learned about before. Teresa was especially committed to her communities. She organized school events, helped her classmates with their work, worked after school as a counselor for elementary school students, taught confirmation classes at her Church, and took care of a host of family-related responsibilities. As one of Teresa' teachers commented, "She is a team player."

Maria , a Latina of Puerto Rican descent, came to Bridges in 9th grade. She was both a diligent and proactive student throughout high school, described by one teacher as "a 'visible' student, one whom all the staff and younger students know." Her works habits were usually good and she was among the strongest math and science students in the class. Her math teacher noted, "Many of the students wanted to work in Maria's group because not only did she understand the work, she had an ability to explain it in a way her classmates would understand." Slightly weaker in history, Maria distinguished herself as both a creative writer and an avid reader. Maria had all A's in math and science classes and mostly B's in her humanities classes. Her overall high school GPA was 3.5. In addition to her strong academic work, Maria was involved in a host of activities throughout high school. She played for an inter-school volleyball team and helped to coach another, was a peer tutor in math, and spent a lot of time involved in church-related activities. During her junior year Maria was also a participant in an Upward Bound program at a local college.[74] Through this program she took additional courses and had

[74] Upward Bound is a pre-college preparation program for low-income students that provides them with additional coursework, college exploration, and support throughout high school.

extra preparation and guidance for the college application and search process. Bridge's college counselor remarked that she wanted to create a "college proactivity" award and grant it to Maria. In a letter of recommendation she described Maria as "one of the most focused, motivated, and diligent members of the senior class." And her 12th grade literature teacher summed her up as follows: "Maria is a young woman trying to understand the world and her place in it. She struggles to define herself in relation to her surroundings and her peers, and she is beginning to accept that relying on herself is tantamount to acceptance from the group. She is a leader in the school and she works hard to create a positive sense of community."

Charles, an African-American/Puerto-Rican male, came to Bridges in the 9th grade. An intellectual young man, he excelled in reading, writing and history. He read over fifty books a year, often ones well above the levels other students' (e.g. Nabokav's *Lolita*), and he was noted by all for being a gifted creative writer. In 10th grade he completed a 40 page short story, discovered his passion for poetry, and committed himself to developing his craft; he took creative writing electives, performed in poetry slams and participated in summer writing programs. He wrote in his college essay, "I have a problem. It's hard to explain the reason behind it. I'm already too hooked to quit. The addiction keeps calling me. The feel of the pen, the sound of it touching the paper, the words staining the page with my thoughts... The experts say that first step to solving your problem is admitting you have one. I'm addicted to writing." Despite these strengths, Charles struggled chronically with poor work habits. While he always came to school he almost always arrived late, failed to complete nightly assignments, and turned in major ones late. Some assignments he did not complete for lack of interest, and others were late because he wanted them to be stellar; in sum, he was not a student who was willing to do work for the sake of completion. A self-reflective student, he wrote in one roundtable cover letter, "Me? A responsible student? (Epileptic fit of laughter ensues). Seriously though, for all my intelligence that I'm rumored to exhibit, my work habits are really hardly admirable. I am not consistent in turning work in on time for I have a complex of trying to turn in exemplary work, and most times, I don't finish within deadlines." Further consequences of his perfectionism were his tendencies to become overwhelmed by too many demands and his difficulty accepting critical feedback. The result of all of this was that Charles' grades – mostly B's in the beginning of high school with a few C's towards the end – did not reflect his abilities. His overall high school GPA was 3.0. As one of his teachers wrote in a college recommendation, "While Charles is a truly exceptional young man, he is not a perfect student…Overall, if your college is looking for an independent-minded, extremely intelligent thinker, then Charles in an excellent candidate."

Malik, an African-American male, came to Bridges in the 9th grade and had an overall high school GPA of 2.3. In 9th and 10th grades he had mostly B's, in 11th mostly C's, and in 12th he climbed back to B's except in math where he had a D. He was generally a skilled student, particularly strong in his discussion and analytical skills and weaker in his grammar, test-taking and math. While Malik's attendance was never stellar in high school, his dip in grades in the 11th grade was, in part, explained by a lengthy absence that year due to an illness. Malik's work habits were solid, in that he completed all major assignments and generally did them on time; however Malik did not always push himself

to complete his work to the best of his ability, or to go above and beyond the requirements – getting the work done was his goal. The exception to this was when he was particularly invested in the topic at hand, as was the case for his 12th grade history class. He threw himself into his senior research paper on Patrice Lumumba, for example, a topic no other student had chosen, and completed four drafts of it. His 12th grade history teacher described him as a "motivated student" with a "passionate intellectual curiosity…who seeks out academic challenge." He was a student who did not hesitate to ask for help when he needed it, believed in the importance of education, got excited about the things he was interested in learning, and got through those he was less interested in. Malik concluded in his personal statement for college, "I might not have the grades as some other students, but I feel that with charisma, and leadership skills, [I] could make it at any college."

* * *

Conclusions

Visitors come to Bridges from both outside and inside of the New York City system. Many marvel at its accomplishments, and others contemplate how replicable it is. Some are amazed by the level of work students are asked to do, and others question whether there is enough rigor for all of the students. Some take note of how qualified the staff is in comparison to other urban schools, and others are concerned by how few teachers reflect the backgrounds of the students. All, however, are clear that Bridges is a vast improvement over traditional urban schools.

Bridges is a school that uses its small size to structure teaching and learning differently from the status quo and is explicitly committed to meeting the needs of a traditionally under-served population. In comparison to Fine's Comprehensive High School and other urban public schools, its accomplishments are un-arguable. But what drives the school, as the current principal points out, is that being better than standard is not enough. "[Our mission is to] give all our students, regardless of their background, the skills and opportunity to get a ... college preparatory education ... to provide them with an

education that's going to support them in attending college and being successful in college." He sets this apart from other schools' missions,

> I would say that actually [principals of traditional schools] might say that's their goal...but I certainly don't think that most high schools' principals have the idea that all their kids are going to end up going to college or be prepared for something else. Their goal is really to graduate kids and to keep their drop-out rate down … Our goal is to take it…beyond graduation… And I also think that we're committed to a particular population, which I think most schools if they could get higher level kids they would grab it and they would get rid of other kids.

As Niki, Wesley, Teresa, Maria, Charles, Malik and all other Bridges students were being prepared for college – and as 90% moved onto it as their next step – staff members, while proud of their accomplishments, grappled with whether and how they could do things better. Unearthing more dilemmas that they were dedicated to work through, despite the constraints, they asked: How can we improve students' reading, writing and math skills? Are our classes rigorous enough for the most advanced students? How can we prepare students for standardized tests and still provide authentic learning experiences? How can we address students' many and varying needs? What other experiences do we need to give them to prepare them for college? While they recognize the constraints that make their work difficult and frustrate their efforts, these teachers do not allow such constraints to curtail what they do.

The snapshots of Bridges – its setting, classrooms, performance-based assessment practices, staff meetings, and students – speak for themselves. The school has gone far beyond the status quo of urban public high schools. At the same time, confronted by the same constraints as other urban public high schools, a series of dilemmas emerge in the day-to-day work of Bridges. The following chapter will further explore these dilemmas.

Chapter Four

UNEARTHING THE COMPLEXITIES OF A COLLEGE-FOR-ALL APPROACH: PREPARING FOR THE HIGH SCHOOL-TO-COLLEGE TRANSITION

College-For-All

In the Spring and Summer of 2002 Niki, Wesley, Teresa, Maria, Charles, Malik and almost all of their Bridges classmates prepared to begin college. While they were excited to have gotten as far as they had, the beginning of college brought concerns and worries about what going to college would actually be like. Their teachers had succeeded in engaging them in *learning* and motivating them to pursue higher education, but both students and teachers were unclear about exactly what going to college would look like and whether they were all prepared for it.

A college-for-all approach with low-income students of color is a critical component of the vision of Bridges and other small urban public schools, and a critical step in mediating social reproduction, particularly in a de-industrialized economy (Sassen, 1991); implementing it successfully, however, is far from easy. The challenges of preparing predominately first-generation college-goers for higher education – students who mostly live in under-supported and under-resourced urban communities (Anyon, 1997) and attend underfinanced (CFE v. State of New York, 1999) and overregulated public schools (Apple, 2001; McNeil, 2000) – are numerous and often daunting. The ways in which these challenges present daily dilemmas of practice to educators and manifest themselves in the educational trajectories, particularly the post-secondary ones, of low-income students of color are more varied and intense than many of the founders of the small schools movement may have anticipated. The complexity of the vision of

Bridges, and other small schools, as it plays out through students' high school and college experiences is reflective of the ways in which race, ethnicity, and class define individual and group experiences within the United States and the difficulty schools face, on their own, to overcome such dynamics. It should be enough, and not overly complicated, within a meritocracy for a well-structured school with high expectations of students and a strong teaching staff to prepare its students for college; however, the on-going dilemmas that evolve out of the paradoxes of American society make it such that schools like Bridges face many complicated questions and have few clear answers. While Bridges and other small schools maintain a college-for-all approach, they are "swimming … always against the tide" (Fine et al, Forthcoming) but with little else outside of their walls changing.

This chapter makes transparent and begins to unravel the host of complications and tensions evident in Chapter Three's snapshots of the school, and which emerge more fully in implementing a college-for-all mission with low-income students of color. It does this by first examining the expectations Bridges teachers have of students, how they communicate those expectations to students, and the dilemmas they grapple with as students and teachers work to meet them. It then explores how Bridges students have internalized messages around college-going, how much sense they have made of what the college experience is, and the hopes and concerns they ultimately carry with them to higher education.

Teachers' Expectations

"I want everyone to have the opportunity to choose to go to college."
– Bridges Teacher

The staff at Bridges sets out to provide students with an engaging and democratic education that will prepare them all for college. Most of them, coming from college-educated middle class families, believe that just as it had been assumed they would go to college, it should be no different for their own students. As such, they work hard to send the message to students that they are college-material and expected to go on to higher education.

While going on to higher education is ultimately a choice on the part of a student and his or her family, preparing for and applying to college is not a choice for Bridges students. Given the belief that all graduates should have the option to attend college, Bridges is structured to give all students what they need to do so: teachers make it clear that coursework and graduation requirements are designed to prepare them for college; students are required to complete a college essay as a part of their 12th grade English class; advisory time is devoted to exploring colleges and completing applications; and all students have one-on-one meetings with the college counselor, travel to college fairs, and attend school-sponsored presentations on individual colleges.

When interviewed, Bridges teachers were asked about their – and the school's – expectations for their students. While college was not an explicit part of the question, everyone included it as a part of their answer. "Getting them ready for college…that's something I talk a lot about;" "The education we provide students with at Bridges should allow them to go to college;" "I expect them all to go to college;" "My goal is basically to prepare them for college."

In interviews many teachers also framed their skill and content goals around their understandings of attributes necessary for higher education, emphasizing those identified

by college professors themselves as important (Conley, 2005).[75] They included: thinking critically and problem solving; being strong readers and writers; managing independence; seeking help when needed; being a part of a community; and communicating effectively. The 12th grade English teacher's explanation of the graduation portfolio in literature, for example, illustrates how she used her understanding of college-readiness to design it,

> I would hope that the whole structure of the portfolio would prepare them [for college], because I'm trying to get them to look at the portfolio requirements, make decisions about which assignments they're going to do when … I'm hoping to force them into becoming more self-reflective, knowing themselves well enough to know that that kind of paper will be too hard because this book is so hard…I've been really strict about deadlines…[and] I have been teaching them how to do research on the internet and finding credible sources, how to cite them in a bibliography and how to incorporate them into written work…Learning how to read scholarly reading, like a critical essay, at least once during the year so that they can incorporate evidence from some kind of scholarly article in their essays; that was something that was commonly done in college that I hadn't done in high school…I try to emphasize class participation as a really big part of the grade, because I think that…our students are really strong in their oral participation, and I think that in a lot of colleges that is a way to get recognized.

Like the 12th grade literature teacher, many teachers used their own experiences of transitioning from high school to college as a reference point in defining their goals and teaching. The 10th grade humanities teacher explained,

> I [have the] kids do a lot of reading and writing, which is huge ... the amount of reading you get in college is like unbelievable, but I think students here, we read a lot … And also I feel like they write a lot, especially more formal things, like essays [and] the research papers that we do. I went through high school, I don't ever remember like having a long term essay project, but we had tests, and we had to write an essay on the test. So my first [college] class, she assigned a five page paper, it almost killed me.

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[75] Conley (2005), in hoping to improve college retention and graduation rates, set out to distinguish the difference between students who are "college-ready" from those who are "college-eligible." To do this he conducted focus groups with professors and college staff from 400 research university about the knowledge and skills college students should have upon entering. The list of standards were compiled into a guide book, "Understanding University Success", and can be found at (www.s4s.org).

And the 11th grade Chemistry teacher shared,

> I set the standards based on what I know is expected of them in college…I might even bring in my own books from college to show them how I used to do mine so when they get there it's not really a surprise what they need to do.

As this teacher's comment shows, teachers not only use college as a reference point in their planning, they use it openly with their students, reinforcing the message that they were being prepared for and were expected to go to college. Comments made in classes included, "You will need to be able to do this kind of research in college;" "It will be useful to know about Marx in college;" "We're using study groups now because you should use them in college;" "It will be important to bring your papers to the writing center in college."

In essence, teachers at Bridges work from their understandings of college-readiness to create experiences that will keep students engaged and in high school while at the same time fostering within them the skills and knowledge they believe students need to face the challenges that ultimately lie ahead in higher education. While teachers reiterate their messages about college to their students, nevertheless many of them worry about whether all of their students are indeed prepared for it.

Teachers' Concerns

"College is another goal, but for me it's a complicated goal." – Bridges Teacher

While Bridges holds on to a college-for-all approach, as several classes of students graduated and actually moved on to higher education, many staff members began to question just what this meant – for both students and teachers – with an academically-unscreened and heterogeneous population of students. What does it mean to have students entering high school with reading and math skills on an elementary school level

mixed with students at or above grade level? To have students who hand in almost every assignment without prompting mixed with students who hand in almost none? To have students applying to competitive colleges like Wesleyan and Brown mixed with ones applying to two-year programs at technical colleges like SUNY Cobleskill and CUNY's New York City College of Technology? While a college-for-all approach in an untracked environment is in keeping with Bridges' philosophical beliefs and mission, in practice the realities of these dynamics leave many teachers worrying about how to prepare *all* students for college and some questioning whether they should all go. As one teacher explained,

> I do think it's really hard to have a school that doesn't track the kids and pre-determine what they are going to be and at the same time give kids a wide range of experiences and a wide range of opportunities. I think that's what we need to do, but I think that's really hard.

Are They All Ready?

As the staff at Bridges do all they believe they can to prepare students for college the lingering question remains of how each student will fare once they arrive. On the one hand, most believe they have provided their students with important academic experiences to ease the way. As the principal explained,

> We have a college counseling program…we have students of color with college preparatory academic backgrounds….we expose kids through trips…we stimulate students…we don't hesitate to have conversations about topics they might not have a framework for…we provide opportunities both inside and outside of school…opportunities to be leaders inside the classroom working with other students or to build relationships with adults in intellectually stimulating ways.

And others are confident in the rigor of the coursework offered and thus in their students' abilities to contend with academics in college. One teacher explained,

> If you're doing the work at Bridges, which I think is much harder than most high schools, and you're able to pass and be successful here, then…you can do the work in the college… just even the amount of work they do within their classes and preparing for portfolios is, to me, above and beyond what most students do. And when I see a student's portfolio, the amount of work in there, and just how they can think about what they've learned and talk about it, and it just really amazes me, and how comfortable students are with like getting up in front of a room of people they know or don't know.

But at the same time, many are less sure just how much each one of their students takes from this rigorous curriculum. Teachers know that the majority of their students were largely under-served in local elementary schools, and that, combined with the general effects of poverty on academic achievement (Rothstein, 2004), the skill levels of many students are well-below grade level when they enter Bridges and remain so as they move through. One teacher explained his fears about where this would leave them in college,

> We're struggling with…basic skills, reading and writing skills…I'm telling [students] in 11th grade before you hand in any paper to any professor you need to bring it to a writing center and have it corrected…if they wrote a paper and handed it in, it would not be anywhere near what most professors expect.

Many teachers also worry about the problematic work habits of a lot of their students. They are concerned that they have "held students' hands too much" – extending deadlines, re-working papers with them, giving re-tests, among other things – and that ultimately this would disserve them in the face of fewer supports and "a different set of rules" in college. This presents a conflict for many of the teachers. They believe that it is critical to support their students through high school, providing them with supports middle-class students more readily had from their college-educated families and would continue to have through higher education (Bloom, 2006; Lareau, 2000, 2003;

McDonough, 1997), and at the same time they recognize the hidden dangers to this approach.

What would happen when students no longer had their hands to hold? Had they "enabled" them in detrimental ways? This is a constant dilemma within their practice and a frequent discussion among teachers, both formally and informally; there is never an easy resolution. They find themselves asking: How do you foster achievement in educationally under-engaged students, and at the same time hold them accountable to a set of standards? Isn't the point to get students to do the work so that they can learn – regardless of whether it is done "on time?" Then again, what about teaching the importance of deadlines and how many chances are just too many? Isn't it important to break the learning process down into manageable bites to help students to keep going? But at what point do they have to break it into bites for themselves? Isn't it critical to help students both to be and see themselves as critical thinkers, and, at the same time, isn't it equally important to develop their written and oral communication skills enough so that they can be taken seriously in the outside world? Even if it is possible to balance all of these demands – and Bridges staff keep that as their goal – the challenge is that there is only so much that can be done within the confines of the school day, school year, and the high school experience.

One teacher explained the specifics of the conflict connecting it to her worries about achievement in college:

> In a school like ours, which tries so hard to nurture people and to grow them in the right direction, to try to build their confidence around their academic skills, which they already feel insecure about…we allow certain kinds of non-attention to detail and non-attention to deadline, which actually is something that kills kids in college. I do feel there's an intense pressure as a twelfth grade teacher to stop that enabling

> kind of thing, even though I have a conflict around that because I know that for some kids they need more time, and I need to be more nurturing and allow that. But, I also fear someone telling me that in college they fail because they didn't hand in a paper or something.

The principal reiterated the dilemma:

> A big problem that we have at Bridges is that we give the kids tons of support because we just want to see them succeed…We kind of cut them some slack, and I think probably all schools do that. But we notice it more because its such a small school and we're so involved in the kids' lives ... In some ways we…really force them to be successful sometimes by cutting them slack and sometimes by overly supporting them…Sometimes we give them too much; I'm afraid that when they go away to college and they don't have that, they can't find that, that that's one of the reasons kids aren't successful…With that in mind, I think it is so important that we believe every kid can read certain texts, we believe every kid can write a paper, a research paper, every kid can read books that are even above their level, and they can feel confident that they've understood the text. We have really intellectual stimulating conversations about text, about literature, about history, about science, about math… the kind of conversations that that they will be facing in college.

Ultimately, what all of these questions beg, and what teachers at Bridges are confronting, is a critique of progressive educators who, as Delpit (1995) argues, with the best intentions believe "I want the same thing for everyone else's children as I want for mine," (p. 28) but too often look past the cultural (Bourdieu, 1973), social (Coleman, 1988), and economic capital their own children have (or would have) that automatically make them participants in the culture of power. Were their own practices, Bridges teachers wondered, failing to give students the language and skills critical to entering into that culture of power themselves? Parents worried as well. In contemplating the obstacles Niki might face in college, her father commented,

> [Bridges] coddled her too much and by all the coddling, [it has] not prepared her for the real world. And when she gets there, she may get smacked right in the face…And it's not going to be anybody there, any teachers, that need to take [care of] her.

Some teachers had also begun to worry about the often neglected aspects of college-readiness that extend beyond the realm of academics, aspects neglected, in part, as a function of the class and race differences between Bridges students and staff. One teacher argued that while Bridges at least confronted academic preparation head on, it often failed to address "the whole thing that is not academic" – that is, the other challenges that come with college life for low-income students of color, the social, emotional, and financial ones. Had Bridges prepared students for these? Another teacher touched upon just how complex the college-going experience might be for Bridges students,

> They may have to take care of younger brothers and sisters and cook, and their mother knows that if they go away, she's going to have to hire a babysitter or something ... they financially might not be able to do that. Or the older child might be the translator or there's just a million things… I don't think all kids are ready... I think a lot of kids [feel] pressure from the school, because we push them to be ready for college, and just personally they're not.

These concerns left some teachers at Bridges questioning the assumption that all of their students *should* go to college, but at the same time they were hesitant to voice their concern with other staff members given both the vision of the school and the implications of such a question.

Should They All Go?

Whether all students should go to college is a difficult issue to discuss at Bridges. At the same time, it has been an on-going debate since the earliest days of higher education in America when college was, on the one hand, intended to transmit and preserve elite culture from one generation to the next (Allmendinger, 1975) and on the other a place for "poor, but hopeful, scholars" (Levine & Ndiffer, 1996, p. 37). This debate was later taken on by many educators and activists, among them W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T.

Washington, who argued over not only who should attend higher education but also what the aims and means of it should be.

Today – over forty years after the passage of the Higher Education Act of 1965, which helped to make college an affordable option for low-income students (Mumpers, 1996), and the lifting of restrictions in admissions based on race and ethnicity (Levine & Ndiffer, 1996) – most Americans believe that a college diploma is the only path to a living-wage job, the only "ticket out of their neighborhood and into the mainstream of American life" (Levine, 1986, p.83). As Aronowitz (2000) argued, "For a clear majority entering college is as much an imperative as high school was after World War One…a college degree provides the minimum qualification to enter the market for a large variety of jobs." (p. 9) Regardless, however, of the clear financial benefits of having a college or advanced degree in today's society, there are others who contend that emphasizing college as the best route for all is counter-productive. Rosenbaum (2001) makes this argument in *Beyond College for All: Career Paths for the Forgotten Half*, attributing the gap between those who begin college and those who complete it to a misguided "college for all" approach; instead he advocates a more cohesive school-to-work transition for the vast number of students who are not college-ready.

Beneath these debates lie a host of questions. If college is *not* for all, then who is it for? Who decides who it is for and who it is not for? How do we not regress back to a point where college is primarily for students from middle and upper-class homes and only for those deemed academically-exceptional from working class and poor homes? On the other hand, if college *is* for all, then in what ways has the landscape of higher education evolved to meet the needs of all?

Those teachers at Bridges who question the college-for-all approach confront these very questions. As they imagine the challenges college would present for their students, and debate if they are ready for them, they conjure up the only images of college they know – their own. The majority, having attended very competitive, often elite, residential, liberal arts schools,[76] work off memories of being away at college, forging close relationships with at least one professor, experiencing classrooms characterized by dialogue and critical thinking with some lectures, and doing lots of writing. This image leaves several teachers wondering whether "college"[77] is indeed for all of their students: Is it elitist of them to expect all to attend? Will all of their students succeed in such environments?

While Bridges teachers note that not all of their students will attend such competitive colleges, they are unsure about what other versions of college look like and, more often than not, depict "college" based on their own experience. For example, while upwards of 50% of Bridges graduates attend college in New York City at some point during their post-secondary experiences, staff members discuss college as if they assume it will be a residential experience: "The successful people in college aren't the ones who roll away and hide in their dorm room and study by themselves;" "All of a sudden, they're not home any more. There are no parents…stopping you from drinking all night and then going back to the dorm room and going to sleep;" "When you're in college, there's your school work, then there might be your bank account, then there is like getting your laundry done."

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[76] As noted in Chapter Three, over 50% attended the country's "most competitive" colleges.

[77] I have placed *college* in quotation marks to indicate the relatively narrow image of college many Bridges teachers portray, at the expense of a multiplicity of definitions it actually holds in today's society.

Teachers also assume that the college experience means being in a mostly White environment with a social life on campus revolving around campus events and parties. One teacher worried about how his students would "acclimate to a social environment that's probably extremely different for a lot of them – for the first time they are around a majority of white people." And another commented,

> I don't really think our students are more pulled to drink or do as many drugs as students from the suburbs do [or] students in boarding schools. So, when our kids go away and they're in this world where, all of a sudden, everyone's drinking and doing drugs, they haven't been doing it as much. If they dive in headfirst, they may drown… a lot of suburban kids have been negotiating that balance for a long time, and they've learned how to abuse alcohol and succeed in the classroom at the same time.

There was an on-going assumption that college means a liberal arts education that is intellectually stimulating and academically challenging. Teachers often highlight that students would have long papers to write, a lot of reading, and generally demanding work loads. The principal, in defining college, best captured how many teachers portrayed it to students,

> College is a place for ideas. It's the one place in this world…where it's okay to sit around and just think and just throw out ideas and talk about ideas, just for the sake of knowledge …where the most important thing is to be intellectual…it's a think-fest…where you shape your ideas, where you shape your consciousness, where you shape your mind, where you understand the world at a higher level.

These images of college portrayed by Bridges staff reinforce the ones students have already been given through popular media. TV shows like *A Different World* and *Saved by the Bell: The College Years* and movies like *Old School* portray residential college life, highlighting the social aspects of it, while others like *Higher Learning* and *Good Will Hunting* illustrate the kind of academic engagement described by Bridges' principal. With few other images and little knowledge of the landscape of higher education, such

messages make it difficult for low-income students of color to imagine how they will fit into such an environment and/or whether they would even be able to go given their own family and personal situations.

The reality is, however, that the version of college described above is representative of the experience of only a small portion of college goers in the United States. Today 84% of college students live off-campus; 42% attend public two-year colleges; 40% are enrolled part-time; about one-third are over the age of 24 (US Department of Education, 2003); 80% work an average of 30 hours/week and 23% of full-time students work over 35 hours per week-time (King, 2006).[78] Accompanying this more diverse population of students has been a proliferation of new types of institutions, programs and majors (Levine, 1986, p. 19) with an ever-growing focus on career-focused education (Aronowitz, 2000; Levine, 1986). Given this landscape of higher education and college-going in America, "college" means something more nuanced than what many Bridges teachers often portray it as or what many Bridges students imagine it to be.

Should They All Go? : A Question of Positionality

There are a few teachers at Bridges who depict college in a more varied manner, one more consistent with the realities of college life outlined above. These teachers, more often than not, come from communities more similar to those of Bridges students. When asked whether all students should attend college, three teachers interviewed who had been first-generation college-goers were clear that indeed they should. One explained, "I think it's important to stress that there are different programs…we do have students with very low abilities, and like some of those students are my hardest working students

[78] Research indicates that working more than 20 hours/week detracts from academics and can jeopardize degree completion.

here…we can find somewhere for you to be." And another said, "There's a program for everyone." These teachers highlighted the role of two-year colleges, technical programs, the importance of recognizing living at home as an option, and the benefits of beginning at a public college within New York City where they might feel more comfortable with the population of students. When Bridges hired a college counselor who was Latino and a first generation college-goer himself, he worked to send more varied messages: college is in the city *and* outside; public colleges are often as good as private ones; Opportunity Programs are important options. Together these staff members are beginning to help their students imagine a place for themselves within college and valuing a range of college experiences in ways that counter students' assumptions – e.g. public colleges are "ghetto" and that the only "real college experience" is a residential one.[79]

It is also these teachers who are most aware of the ways and extent to which finances play into decision making for students (Bloom, 2005; Paulsen & St. John, 2002) and they are, more often than not, the ones who bring issues of money to the surface. As one recalled,

> For me, what was most challenging was the nuts and bolts of financial aid… both me and my mother did not understand, like we got a loan, we spent the money buying stuff for my room…not tuition… you need to know that…Budgeting money, managing money… last year we went to the college trip, students just hear how much a college costs, and they're like, "Oh, that's it." Like that's it…And I was like hold on, stop. I went into a little bit of my experience and my story…When I got accepted [to college] and said I was coming, they sent me my financial aid packet, and it wasn't bad. Like my family didn't have any money, so we were mostly loans and scholarship, but I had to pay some…some adult told me, "No, just tell them that's too much." I wrote them a letter. They sent it back with a lower payment. They lowered it twice. So then I wrote again. Kids need to hear that.

[79] Comments about public colleges being "ghetto" or not "as good as private colleges" were voiced both by students at Bridges and by graduates who talked about their pre-conceived notions of college before attending.

In contrast, other teachers downplay the importance of money, telling students not to worry about it when they apply, assuring them that there is plenty of financial aid available, and reminding them that most college-goers take out loans.[80] For example, at a presentation for 11th graders a representative of the State University of New York (SUNY) went through more details about the college application process in twenty minutes than many of the students had probably ever heard before – application requirements, costs, the Education Opportunity Program (EOP), majors, locations, among others. The representative insisted that SUNYs annual tuition of $15,000 was inexpensive – "Now you tell me again that's a lot of money," he remarked. Knowing that it indeed *was* a tremendous amount for their families, when it was then time for questions those students who spoke up focused solely on issues of money. One of their teachers, a White middle class man, urged, "Don't let money be a barrier. There is plenty of money out there – you will get work-study and grants and loans." In reality, while tuition has steadily increased at both private and public colleges (Gladieux, 2004), grant-based aid has steadily decreased (Gladieux, 2004; Kahlenberg, 2004), leaving low-income students less publicly supported financially than their middle-class peers (Paulsen & St John, 2002) and faced with taking out loans they fear they will not be able to pay back (McDonough, 1997).[81]

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[80] Bloom (2005) cites this same trend – teachers telling students not to "worry about money yet" – in her study of how finances affect students' approaches to college-going and how small public high schools address the issue.

[81] In a presentation to Bridges about the issues affecting graduates in college, one teacher raised the question of why the graduates were so unwilling to take out loans when she never questioned taking them out to get through college. This is a common reaction among adults who themselves took out loans for college. The difference is that many of the adults who raise this issue do not come from backgrounds that are as financially challenged as low-income students, and/or they come from families where they were not the first to attend college and from communities where the majority of high school graduates go to and complete college. For more discussion on the reservations of low-income students taking out loans see McDonough (1997) and Bloom (2005).

Another teacher, who had grown up upper-middle class and attended an Ivy League university, was acutely aware of just how different his own experiences were from his students' and worried about how his limited knowledge of the landscape of higher education and his limited understanding of the issues affecting low-income students of color influenced the guidance he gave to his students. He explained,

> It's pretty clear how different my experience was from what's going to be theirs, almost all theirs. No Bridges kid does four hours of homework a night. There were semesters in college where I had to read three books a week …but I don't think any Bridges kid is going to go to a school—not many, I mean we sent a couple of kids to Wesleyan—but not many kids are going to have those intensive courses…or have a paper, or two papers, to write a week …and no Bridges kid has two parents who are professors… and no Bridges kid is going to go to a four year school without taking out a lot of money and working.

Having taught at Bridges for eight years, this teacher was becoming more aware of how complicated college-going was for his students and had begun to re-assess what he believed was an "elitist" approach to the college process on the part of the school. He worried about the staff's collective understanding of the transition to college, and he criticized the staff for too often emphasizing what had been most important in many of their own lives in applying to college: getting into and attending the most prestigious school possible. He argued,

> This is where having a diverse staff really helps. Teachers who are more economically disadvantaged and went to public universities and who dealt with all of the issues that are attached to the money problems or went to a city school—it's important that students have those role models to talk to people who had those experiences.

Despite these acknowledgements, or perhaps as evidence of his argument, this same teacher had trouble moving past his preconceived notions of college and demonstrated his limited knowledge of the landscape of higher education. When he talked about community colleges he referred to them as "programs"; he wondered if

one could study to be a janitor in a technical school in the way that one could study to be a nurse; and he worried about one of his top students being able to go to a competitive college given that she had to live with and support her grandmother – disregarding the many competitive colleges she could attend as a commuter student.

Social Reproduction through Higher Education: A System of Tracking

Underlying the struggle to guide students around issues of higher education is the recognition by many teachers that while there might be different types of colleges providing opportunities to students, these opportunities exist in a hierarchy which itself results in the very social reproduction (Bowles & Gintis, 1976) Bridges sets out to mediate. Bridges rejects tracking, for example, because it is unwilling to label individuals and prepare them for different futures. If going to an elite college was what Bridges teachers were prepared for, shouldn't the same hold true for their own students? Many are leery of encouraging students to attend technical or community colleges because that is exactly what many low-income students of color who want to go to college are counseled to do (Burd, 2002; Carnevale & Rose, 2003; Gandara, 2002; McDonough, 1997; McPherson & Schapiro, 1999). While such "programs" would offer graduates a degree of social mobility, they would not thrust them into positions of power within society.

In effect, these teachers understand that with changes in who goes to college, and an increase in those going, America's system of higher education affords distinct opportunities to different people (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Brint & Karabel, 1989; McPherson, 1999). Elite, competitive colleges have changed little, thanks in part to the creation of less competitive college options. As Brint and Karabel (1989)

argue, elite colleges have come to see institutions like the two-year college as a "safety valve [to]…satisfy the demands of access while protecting their own institutions." (208)[82]

Who goes to which type of college within this hierarchy is evidence of the way in which the system of higher education serves the same reproductive function as the K-12 system – e.g. only 3% of students entering the country's most competitive elite colleges in 1995 were first-generation and from low-income families (Bowen et al, 2005), while only 12.9% of students from middle-income families and 8.1% of students from high income families enroll in two-year colleges (McPherson & Schapiro, 1999). The result is that America's system of higher education is highly stratified according to class. As Bowles and Gintis (1976) argue,

> Higher education has developed a multi-tiered system dominated at the top by Ivy League institutions and the great state universities, followed by the less prestigious state universities, state colleges, and ending with the community colleges. The system reflects both the social status of the families of the students and the hierarchy of work relationships into which each type of student will move after graduation. (p. 209)

Dilemmas of Practice: Other People's Children

As teachers at Bridges struggle to make sense of the system of higher education for themselves – and reconcile their philosophical beliefs about how to guide students – those from White middle-class backgrounds confronted additional complications embedded within teaching "other people's children" (Delpit, 1995). Such complications reveal that, as Delpit (1995) wrote, "[A]ppropriate education for poor children and

[82] It is important to note that despite the critique of the stratification of higher education, and the focus on community colleges acting as a "safety valve" (Brint & Karabel, 1989) in particular, research shows that community colleges play an important role in providing a financial advantage to students who complete degrees or certificates (Dougherty, 2002; Grubb et al, 1997; Jacobs, 2001) and are particularly important in that they are the best example of an institution that continually changes to adapt to the needs of the communities they serve (Bailey & Averianova, 1999).

children of color can only be devised in consultation with adults who share that culture…Good liberal intentions are not enough." (p. 45) As one teacher, a Latino from a low-income background, commented,

> To be fully candid, the school culture has been set up and designed, and is maintained and carried by – not by people of color. That is evident in the style – in the school that's been created…For me, if something is good, it doesn't necessarily matter who started it – if it works, it works…But what I find interesting is – then, how are people – helped for it to be made theirs? … Can it be made the community's? … You're creating, setting up and managing an environment of people of color, by people that are not of color.

Such complexities are inherent not only to the history and evolution of Bridges, but more generally to the small schools movement, and even more broadly to public education within the United States; however, the dilemmas evolving out of such dynamics become particularly poignant as they surface through the question of if, and how, to prepare all students for college. As noted, there were many unresolved questions Bridges staff members had about college-going for all of their students. To summarize, they included: *Are all Bridges students prepared academically for college? How can we prepare them all for higher education when so many enter the school with skills well-below grade level? Do we hold their hands too much throughout high school, in ways that will be a disservice to them as they transition into college? How do the needs and cultures of students' families influence their opportunities around college-going? How will our students fit in to the image we hold of "college"? What obstacles will they face as low-income students of color – other than academic ones – and how much will those obstacles shape their post-secondary experiences? And ultimately, should we be counseling all of them to go to college*

The unresolved questions, tensions and limited knowledge with which many Bridges staff members approached the college-going process made the messages they sent and guidance they gave to students around higher education particularly problematic. As their students, most of whom had little understanding of the landscape of higher education, tried to digest the messages and develop a knowledge-base about college-going for themselves they struggled to piece together an accurate vision of what college might look like for them and to figure out if and how they would fit in. As one teacher, first-generation college-goer herself, argued,

> I know kids go on college visits. I don't know how different those schools are [from one another] … but many kids ...they think that's all college is. ..[We need to] to make it more like less of this kind of big thing in the sky.

Students' Experiences with the High School-to-College Transition

Looking closely at students' process of preparing for their transition to college reveals the ways in which the tensions and dilemmas voiced by teachers were embedded in and ultimately would travel with Bridges students. While proud to be going to college – one said, "I made it to college…I'm actually here!" and another, "I'm just so excited about going to college…I'm finally here!" – they were also anxious about just what this meant for themselves and their families. Their anticipations and concerns speak to both the impact of their high school experiences and the presence of the various other forces at play that would make their transitions to college complex. Many voiced confidence that they would persist, and yet, there were numerous issues that plagued them: Would they have enough money? Would they fit in? How would professors see them? Would they be prepared for the rigors of coursework? How well would they manage the independence they were afforded? How different were college classes from high school ones? Did they

choose the right career focus? And ultimately, would they end up disappointing those who had helped them to get so far? Beneath all of these questions lay the larger ones of how much they had come to understand about college and to what extent they had answered for themselves why and where they wanted to go to college.

Below are a series of snapshots that look closely at the college plans of Niki, Wesley, Teresa, Maria, Charles and Malik as they prepared to begin their journeys. They are not only an important marker of the individual processes they went through in deciding whether and where to go to college, the images of college they carried with them, and the fears and hopes they faced, they are also a window into the collective experience of low-income students of color in transitioning to college. Following the snapshots is a thematic look at the issues that begin to emerge in the high school-to-college transition process across Bridges students.

* * *

Up Close: Looking Within
Spring/Summer 2002

Niki planned to study psychology at a private "competitive," four-year college on Long Island. Because of low SAT scores she would be a part of a program that provided her with extra academic support and required her to take classes with other students in the program; as it was not an HEOP program it did not offer financial assistance. While resentful that she was placed in the program to begin with, she did believe it would serve as an important support and was resolved to place out of it by the end of her first year. The oldest of five children, Niki would be the first in her family to attend college. Her mother began a two-year college but became pregnant shortly afterwards and never returned. Her father, who moved between low-paying jobs and prison, had never begun college. Niki wanted to go to college to distinguish herself: "I didn't want to be like everybody else, all out in the streets... I wanted to do something with myself." She chose her college primarily because of the financial aid package she was awarded and the fact that her best friend from Bridges would be attending. She had not visited the college until after deciding to attend. While she was excited to start, she was worried about everything from what the classes would be like to how she would wake herself up every morning. She was particularly concerned about the professors: their accessibility - "My schedule might collide with the time they give students"; their perceptions of her if she went to

them for help– "They might be like – 'Well how did you get to college if you don't know that?'"; and how well they would know her and want to help her in the face of a conflict – "Who do I ask [for help]? Who do I tell? Will they even believe me?" Given all of these concerns, Niki was relieved that she would be attending college with her friend and, at her core, was confident that she would persist. "I know for a fact I'm not going to let my grades just plummet," she stated. "I *know* that won't happen because I won't let that happen."

Wesley planned to study business at a private, "very competitive" four-year college on Long Island. One of four siblings, he would be the first in his family to attend college – his two older brothers never completed high school and his sister was younger. Wesley wanted to go to college since the 9th grade. "No one, besides my cousin went to college, and she dropped out," he explained. "And I'm not trying to sound arrogant…but I know I'm very smart and I know I can be successful." Despite his confidence, and his overwhelming excitement, Wesley did have a host of concerns, not the least of which was money. He chose his college based on the financial aid package he received (he too had not visited until he accepted admittance). Though $21,000 out of $25,000 would be covered, he and his mother were less sure of how the remaining $4,000 would get paid. They were even more overwhelmed to learn that it would end up being more than $4,000 per year when other costs were included. Wesley also worried about the independence he would be afforded in college, both in terms of academics and socializing, but was pretty sure he could "pull it off" in the end. More than anything as he walked away from his high school graduation he felt excited: "I'm finally here," he exclaimed.

Teresa planned to study accounting at a four-year "very competitive" public university in New York City. She would be enrolled through the SEEK program. One of five children, Teresa would not be the first in her family to begin college, but she hoped to be the first to finish. Her older sister began at Hunter College, but for a variety of reasons, including the fact that she failed to attend her SEEK summer program, she never completed a semester there; she ultimately enrolled in a for-profit trade school, received a certificate in hotel management, and then worked several retail jobs for slightly-over minimum wage to pay off the sizable debt from her training school. Teresa was committed to avoid following in her sister's footsteps, commenting, "For her, college wasn't like it's gonna be for me." Of Teresa's other siblings, one brother was still in elementary school and her two older brothers did not graduate high school. These realities, combined with an image of success, drove Teresa to higher education. "I just thought it would be nice to be a successful woman…have my own apartment and my own things. And I know I won't get there unless I go to college," she explained. Teresa had dreamed of going away to college – "to know what's out there" – but this was not an option for her. Though her parents were very proud that she would attend a four-year college, her father would not permit a daughter to sleep outside of his home until she was married and her mother worried that when children go away to college "they come back thinking they are better than you." Hopeful that she could still have a "real college experience," Teresa decided she would set up her room "in a college way" and make clear to her family that she would be more independent than she had been in high school. While she too was concerned about the challenges of college, and questioned whether her

weak math skills would make it difficult to do well in accounting, she believed that, because she had chosen a major that she was interested in, "college will go by fast. It's like you won't even feel it."

Maria planned to study early childhood education and writing at a private, "most competitive," small liberal arts college in Connecticut. An only child, she had lived alone with her mother ever since the 7th grade when her father passed away. She would be the first in her immediate and extended family to attend college and had wanted to go ever since elementary school. During high school Maria participated in an Upward Bound program at a local college, which further propelled her towards this goal. She had some concerns, namely that she would not maintain the discipline she needed to stay on top of her school work, have a social life, and participate on the volleyball team. She was particularly worried about not sleeping enough and gaining weight. For the first time she would have both the freedom to socialize with friends – her mother never permitted her to date or go out at night – and access to more food than she had ever had before – "I can have cereal whenever I want…At home if you eat it all the time then…you've got nothing to eat for breakfast." Combined, she worried this lack of discipline would make it hard for her to stay in shape for the volleyball team and healthy enough to stay on top of her work. Maria was also particularly worried about her mother for whom, as her mother put it, "Maria is the only one I have." Given that her mother had no phone, and no job, it would be difficult for them to talk. Despite all of these concerns, Maria could not wait to begin, "I'm already seeing four years in advance. I'm graduating with my diploma."

Charles planned to attend a small private "competitive" college in New York City, through an HEOP program, and study writing. An only child, he lived alone with his mother. Charles always imagined he would go to college – in part because of his mother's expectations and in part because he could not imagine working any job requiring only a high school diploma. He had been inspired by watching his mother return to school to complete her GED and then her Associates and furthermore, while critical of the assumption that people have to go to college to succeed, he was convinced that the credential was needed. "It's the only thing that's going to have you taken seriously ever…it's about the title," he explained. While Charles entered high school with ambitions of going to Harvard or Yale, once his academic work load increased he became more overwhelmed than he had ever imagined he would; in particular, he had a hard time keeping up with both his academics and college search and application process. In reflecting on how he chose where he would apply, he commented, "I threw up the college book and applied to whatever page it landed on." He also unexpectedly struggled with the question of whether he wanted to go away, but once he was rejected by the two residential colleges to which he had applied and his mother was diagnosed with Stage III breast cancer,[83] the decision to be a commuter student was made for him. Despite the fact that his college was more or less chosen for him, from what Charles knew of it he believed it would be a good match –he would be in good company intellectually, and though the academic work would be rigorous, he thought that would make it engaging.

[83] While many women are affected by breast cancer, late detection is in part the result of the cost of mammograms and failure of health care companies to cover pre-screening.

He did worry about getting overwhelmed by the work load, his problematic study habits, and ultimately not being fulfilled by college. At the same time, he was resolved to work past these challenges because his biggest fear was not being able to "prove" himself in the academic world and ending up "a cog in the capitalist engine."

Malik planned to attend a "less competitive" 2-year SUNY in upstate New York to study business with a focus on sports management. He lived with his mother, younger sister, and niece and would be the first in his family to attend college; his brother took a handful of classes at a community college but never pursued a degree. During his senior year Malik grappled with whether or not to attend college. While he moved forward with the application process alongside his classmates, he was not as invested as he thought he should have been. He explained, "I wanted to go to college but [I] was [also] like I'm alright with a high school diploma." As he continued to listen to his classmates talk about going, have his teachers encourage him to go, and watch TV shows like *A Different World* and *Saved by the Bell: The College Years*, college became more enticing. Thinking about what he would do if he did not go to college further pushed him to want to attend: "It was just the point of like laying around the house and not doing nothing…and being with my mother all the time." The one thing he was clear on was that if he were to go to college it would not be in New York City. As he explained, "If you want to go to college, you got to go away… You can go to City College, but as far as real college experience, you won't fulfill it if you stay in the city and live near your parents." Thus he decided to attend a college that was upwards of eight hours away and where he had never visited, but where one of his closest friends from Bridges would also attend. He knew he would miss his family when he was away, and he was nervous about this along with concerns about the academics and social life; but the more Malik thought about college and looked at those in his neighborhood who had not gone, the more excited he was to begin.

* * *

Stepping Back: Looking Across

Un-Informed/Mis-Informed "Choices"

"I threw up the college book and applied to whatever page it landed on." – Charles

As the above snapshots indicate, while many high school students, particularly those from college-educated middle and upper-class families, carefully calculate where to apply and ultimately go to college, most students at Bridges make their lists and decisions considering far fewer criteria. Most express a strong desire to attend college – for reasons similar to those Niki, Wesley, Teresa, Maria, Charles, and Malik voiced. Yet, with approximately 70% coming from families where their parents had at most a GED or high

school diploma, most Bridges students enter high school with little knowledge and understanding of college. Many do not know the difference between an Associates and a Bachelors degree, a liberal arts and a vocational one, a residential college and a commuter one. Many are unaware of the differences between various colleges – privates, Ivy-Leagues, SUNYs, CUNYs, two-years and four-years. While they receive messages from their teachers that they should aim for college and internalize them, exactly what this means is often unclear to them and makes it all the more difficult for them to develop a college-going identity. As Bloom (Forthcoming) argued,

> [T]he lack of easy access to information about higher education and the application process plays an important role in the challenges [first-generation college-goers] face. Many middle class students are surrounded by this information, without even being aware of it: parents' conversations about their alma maters and college days, family friends who apply a few years ahead of them, the names of top colleges that are a part of every day conversations among their peers…[B]eyond the difficulties this creates in actually navigating the application process for poor and working class students, the fact that higher education is unfamiliar territory – that they are traveling to a foreign country rather than the next state over – plays an important role in the anxieties involved in this process. (p. 19)

With the goal of preparing all students for college, the question becomes to what degree does Bridges structure its practices not only to help students see themselves as college-material, but also to help them to explore what this means and ultimately take ownership over their decision making process. While assuming that low-income students of color should go to college is an important step towards providing an equitable education to them, understanding what cannot be assumed – a belief that they *belong* in college and an understanding of the landscape of both higher education and career opportunities – is also critical.

Bridges helps students take many of the necessary steps to apply to college and guides them to take ownership over their learning in their academics, however students

usually go through the college application process more blindly than many of their teachers would like. While teachers are aware that their students need to grapple with questions like going away or staying in the city, attending a predominately White college versus a more diverse one, what their own interests and passions are and how to pursue them; with all of the other responsibilities on their plates and the constant pressure to prepare students academically, finding the time to help students sort out their answers to these questions is difficult. Further complicating the situation is that the every day messages they send to students about college are, more often than not, based on their own experiences in higher education and as a result too often simplified in ways that do not reflect what Bridges students will confront.

A journal exchange between a 9th grade student and her teacher reveals this very dynamic. While she was already looking forward to college and beginning to imagine herself there, she had a host of misunderstandings and questions about it. She wrote,

> Yesterday I was planning on what I want to do in the future. I want to be a lawyer, but the only law school I know is John Jay which I don't want to go to. I want to go far far away. I want to dorm at college for one year, then get an apartment and work while I'm going to school. These are my plans for the future. I know they say it's about 7 [years] of school to be able to become a lawyer, but I don't care because that's what I want to be. But I wonder if I should start now. By that I mean like going to a high school that has to do with law because then what am I doing at Bridges?

The teacher's response, while reinforcing the student's goal of college, sent an overly simplified message. She wrote,

> Wow! You're exploring your dreams, doubts, and questions all in one entry. You are in a college prep school getting a fantastic education. Get A's and get a scholarship to a pre-law college.

While assuring, the teacher's response skipped over the misinformation, questions, and struggles noted in the entry: What is the difference between undergraduate and law

school? What are names of "law schools" other than John Jay, which in fact is not a law school but rather a college of criminal justice? What are the connections between high school course of study and college major? How does one prepare for college? What does residential college life look like and where does work fit in? How available are need-based scholarships? In failing to address students' questions and misunderstandings the teacher leaves her student to continue to grapple with them on her own with limited and sometimes incorrect information – a missed opportunity to help her to understand what lies beyond high school, to figure out what she wants, and to begin to imagine how she might fit in.[84]

While this student was only in 9th grade and at the beginning of her college exploration process, by the time Bridges students are seniors their understanding of college choices is only marginally more developed. Many still do not know much about the schools on their lists, and, by the time they make their decision of where to go, few have visited the school where they plan to spend the next few years.

While many high school seniors debate whether they want a large or small school, rural or urban one, art-intensive or science-intensive one, Bridges students have a different decision-making process based on their more limited information and resources. Niki applied to the college she chose because, as she explained, "I heard it was a really nice school from a friend of mine. She told me to apply so I did and got in." Similarly, Malik, having not been on top of his application process, applied at the last minute to the same school his close friend was planning to attend. Teresa was limited in her choices by

[84] While all such questions cannot be thoroughly addressed whenever raised, heightening teachers' awareness of the possible internal struggles students have would help to moderate the messages that get sent about college. Moreover, having a clear place within the school to address these issues would help students to explore their questions in a supported way. This will be further discussed in Chapter Seven.

her father who asserted she could not leave the city; and, while Charles was tempted to go away, he did not want to leave his mother alone as she had been diagnosed with breast cancer. Maria, through her Upward Bound program, was the only one who had visited several colleges, including the one she would attend. Niki, Wesley, Teresa, Charles, and Malik, like most other Bridges students, had mostly learned about the colleges on their list through the internet and the books available at school.

In the end, when it came time to decide among the schools they admittedly knew little about, their choices were all based upon financial aid packages. Although research shows that making a choice based on college costs negatively impacts persistence (Paulsen & St. John, 2002), for Bridges students it was the only way they could chose. Niki contemplated Howard, and her college counselor encouraged her to go there for its prestige, but Howard gave her little money, particularly in comparison to the college she would attend. Wesley did visit his first choice college, which was in Pennsylvania, but they did not offer him as much money as the college he would attend. Similarly, while Maria very much wanted to attend University of Tampa, the school she would attend – although vastly different from Tampa –covered all but $1000 of the $40,000 bill, and a scholarship from the Hispanic Fund for $1,500 covered the rest. Teresa and Charles had both been admitted to the colleges they chose through New York State's Opportunity Programs which offered financial assistance, and Malik would attend a SUNY where he believed costs would be manageable along with the aid he received.

As Bridges students prepare to attend college, the limited exposure they have to higher education in general and the limited exploring they do around it while in high

school, leave them uncertain and anxious about what they will find when they begin. They know it will be different from high school, but they are not sure exactly how.

Concerns and Expectations:
Academics and "the whole thing that is not academic"

> *"I guess I had the whole idea of college being like what you see in the movies."*
> *– Bridges Student*

While many graduates surveyed admitted not knowing what to expect in college, others used images they had scotch-taped together about what college would be like to imagine the experience. Mostly they brought forward the images of college most familiar to them – those they had seen on TV. When surveyed one graduate commented, "I expected college to be kind of TV-like…I just thought it was going to be party-central." Another, "I expected college to be like the TV show *A Different World*."[85] And a third, "I guess I had the whole idea of college being like what you see in the movies." For some, what the media showed them was exciting – Malik recalled scenes of parties and friendships – while for others it was more daunting. The predominant image in Niki's head came from a Visine commercial: "The guy is talking and…everybody's sitting there looking all dragged and… tired. I just think of college as that way."

The words graduates most often used to define their expectations of college were: "hard and scary," "difficult," "lots of partying," "overwhelming," "you become a number." And though many said they were confident in their skills – particularly reading, writing and oral communication – and believed they had the motivation they needed to persist, they were worried about a host of things, both academic and non-academic.

[85] The TV show *A Different World* was referred to by several students when asked about their expectations of college in surveys, interviews, and focus groups.

Malik and Teresa both worried about the majors they were pursuing – business and accounting respectively – highlighting that they were weak in math and were unsure of whether this would affect their ability to do well within their concentration. Many, having come to appreciate the approach to teaching in their high school classes and their relationships with teachers, were concerned about the pedagogical shift they expected they would face in college. Niki worried about professors speaking too fast and being inaccessible. She explained, "I need [professors] to know who I am. I can't be in the back of a studio and just listening to a lecture, then bounce every day. I can't do that…I might pass by the skin of my teeth…but I won't really be learning anything." Malik noted, "I know at Bridges they always taught us it doesn't matter if you get the answers right, it's how you do the question…College might be like, you've got to get the answer right, no matter what." While he knew he would have to adapt to lectures, Malik had come to believe that discussion-based approaches to learning fit well with his learning style, "I learned more from discussions at Bridges than I learned from books…I learned from other classmates." And Maria imagined a scene where she would have to run after professors for help and their response would be, "You've got to catch me. I'm in a rush!"

In part, what lay beneath these concerns was what Steele (1999) calls stereotype threat.[86] Graduates were worried about looking like they did not belong and, possibly,

[86] Steele (1995) defines stereotype threat as: the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype. The notion emerged out of research he did with African-American students around standardized testing. He first presented a GRE test to college students, both White and African-American, explaining that it was an ability test similar to the SAT; the African-American students performed dramatically less well than white students. Steele then gave another GRE exam, but this time he explained that it was not an ability-test but rather measured content knowledge. While African-American students have been told – over and over – that statistics show they do not perform well on ability tests like the SATs, this is not the case for content tests. When the students took the exam the second time under the auspices of it being a test measuring content knowledge the scores of the African-American students rose to equal or at times exceed those of white students. Steele concluded that African-American students internalize negative stereotypes and

affirming professors' preconceived notions of who they were and why they were there. On the one hand, as Charles pointed out, they did not have the cache of coming from a high school that was "known" – "no one's ever really heard of us" – and on the other they were urban students of color. Wesley explained his concern, "[Professors] will automatically pass judgment on me… [have] a stereotype of me before [knowing] me." He then fleshed out one of his greatest fears, "When I give [a professor] the work I've done, and he's surprised by what I've done, he doesn't think that it's me. He thinks that I plagiarized … [because] I'm a black inner city [kid]." Similarly Niki worried about the implications of going to professors for help, "They might be like, 'Well, how did you get to college if you don't know that?'" She was equally concerned about what other students would think of her. "I'm afraid of looking stupid," she admitted.

Given what they had heard about college, even if they had strong academic skills, these students wondered how they would compare to other students. As Wesley noted, "The only doubt I have now is that I am going to go in as confident as I am now, and that when I get there there's going to be a whole different ballgame." Given that many believed being recognized, and known, was what got them through high school, some had begun to anticipate needing this in college. Charles commented, "I'm not striving for fame, I just want to be recognized."

Also embedded in students' concerns about relationships with professors was their ambivalence around how prepared they were for the independence college would afford– both academic and otherwise. With regards to the former, while some of them had relied

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translate the expectation of low achievement into performance anxiety; their fear of reinforcing negative stereotypes is so great that they perform worse than they would without such fears. I apply his theory throughout this dissertation to several of the experiences of Bridges graduates, particularly those attending colleges where they were an under-represented group in regards to race and ethnicity.

on the flexibility of their teachers in high school and their teachers' commitment to making sure they understood what was being taught, they did not believe it would be the same in college. As Teresa said, "It's their class and its either you learn it or you don't." And beyond academic independence, those who were going away were aware that they would have to be responsible for everything from waking themselves up in the morning to doing their own laundry, alongside keeping up with their academics and making money. "I just worry about those things," Niki admitted.

Social life in college also presented a different set of concerns for Bridges graduates than it does for many college-going seniors. While Maria looked forward to parties and dating – particularly since her mother did not allow her to date or go out at night in high school – she questioned how disciplined she would be with this newfound freedom. Wesley was also excited to be a part of a campus community, but he too carried concerns about balance; and Malik wanted a social life but was particularly anxious about the role of drugs, having seen what they had done to too many of his relatives. He had spent high school avoiding them, and while he believed he would be strong enough to do the same through college, he did worry about peer pressure in a residential setting. Other graduates, for these and other reasons, imagined college without a social life. Niki asserted she did not want to get involved with anything social that would "interfere with [her] work," and Teresa, who would be living at home with a father who would not let her socialize outside of school, contended, "I really just want to go to college, do my work, and then just [leave]." Charles imagined college without friends in part as a defense against fears of not belonging within his predominately White and middle-class

college: “I can do well in solitude… I just want to establish my own thing and not care about everyone else.”

Last but by far not the least, even though graduates had chosen their colleges based on financial aid packages, money was of particular concern to them and their families. The summer before beginning, Wesley’s mother was surprised by a bill for $3,000 due before the Fall that indicated she would have to pay another $3,000 come Spring. That was not how she or Wesley had understood the package they had previously received. Though Wesley assured her he would make Dean’s list and secure more aid, his mother was already nervous about how she would make ends meet; with no established credit she did not think she would qualify for a parent’s loan. Maria’s mother was also concerned despite not having to pay any tuition balance. Over the summer she received a list of things Maria needed for school; while they had some of the items at home there were others they did not have. With no job, her mother explained, “I can’t buy it off the little bit I have right now.” Until Maria got an on-campus job to buy extra-long sheets for her dorm bed or an alarm clock, she would use a sleeping bag and rely on her roommates to wake her up. Even Charles and Teresa, who were both a part of Opportunity Programs, worried tremendously about money. Charles wondered how he would pay for books, eat, and afford subway fare; and Teresa worried that her financial aid package would fall apart as she had seen happen to others she knew.

Bridges graduates were not alone in heading off to college with more questions than answers about both themselves and what college had in store for them; the difference was that as low-income students of color they had fewer safety nets to catch them if they fell, fewer guaranteed rewards in the end, and a lot more to prove. Furthermore, while they

would sit alone in their classes and in the library completing their work, their families – and, for some, their communities – were looking to them to succeed. They all worried, perhaps most of all, about disappointing them. As Niki said, "I worry about letting them down… I don't just do it for myself, I do it for everybody else too.

Conclusions

In many respects the concerns and expectations about college held by Bridges students and staff are not dissimilar; they both worry about what the course work will be like, how students will adjust to the different relationships with professors, and how they will adapt to the independence college affords. In other respects, their concerns differ, or are at least given differential weight. As teachers based their concerns on their own experiences in college, as predominately White middle-class college-goers they worked from a more limited understanding of the obstacles, particularly non-academic ones, their students would face. At the same time Bridges students, despite an incomplete picture of what going to college would look like, having lived as low-income students of color all of their lives in communities with others just like themselves, had gathered a host of concerns about which to worry.

In the end, where teachers and students were most similar was that despite their internal questioning about college-going, the vast majority had come to believe college is the next critical step after high school. Thus they were both resolved to working through the dilemmas that were part and parcel to the college-transition process. For teachers, the ways these dilemmas manifested themselves in daily practice – whether to extend a deadline, give a re-test, place a phone call for a student to a college about their financial aid package, among other things – reflect the larger dilemmas they face in implementing a philosophy of college-for-all. And regardless of which of these tensions were voiced

and which unspoken, graduates embody them all as they move out of Bridges and into college.

Has Bridges done "*enough"* to prepare its graduates for these new realities – both teachers and administrators want to know. The principal, in summing up the multitude of concerns staff have, articulated the realization that college-for-all, or rather college for all low-income students of color, is a complex goal:

> First and foremost is how did we do? What worked? What didn't work? What skills did you receive? What habits? Certainly about our college process, our college counselors, choosing the right college, financial aid… Even if they get into college, all those little steps... How are we in supporting you or not…[In college are] there support systems ? Do they feel comfortable? What is it like being an African American, a Latino at their school?… To kids that left was it too hard? Did you go for help? Did you have five classes like that where you just felt like you just couldn't do it? You felt everybody in the class was smarter than you, was that the reason? Did you feel uncomfortable? Did you miss home? … If they transferred is it because they just chose the wrong school? Because they are running away? Running to something? Money-wise, job-wise, resource-opportunity-wise? What activities are they involved in outside of academics?

Within the next two chapters these and other questions will be addressed through the voices of Bridges graduates and specifically through the lived experiences of Niki, Wesley, Charles, Teresa, Maria and Malik as they moved into, out of, and through post-secondary education.

Chapter Five

UNEARTHING THE COMPLEXITIES OF A COLLEGE-FOR-ALL APPROACH: YEAR ONE

"I thought college could be a big happy roller coaster –but college is an up and down roller coaster." – Malik

When Bridges staff members watch their students walk away from graduation heading for the world of college, they have many hopes, fears and questions about what their experiences will be like. Having adopted the vision of a college-for-all approach, they know there will be complications for their students, but many are unaware of just what their students are up against. As the snapshots below begin to reveal, Bridges faculty had asked many of the right questions about preparing their students for college but there were others they had not even raised. Niki, Wesley, Teresa, Maria, Charles and Malik's first year journeys alone reveal a set of obstacles more varied and constant than many of their teachers ever imagined. Their experiences help to further unearth a complex story – one which features both graduates' intense desire to learn *and* how trying their journeys through college are. This complexity speaks most pointedly to the mission of Bridges – specifically, the challenges of preparing all students in an academically heterogeneous population for college and then sending them out to a range of institutions that together reflect the strengths of the system of higher education in the United States, as well as the many problems inherent to it.

* * *

Looking Closely: Fall 2002

Niki was where she expected to be – at a private "competitive" college on Long Island – sharing a dorm room with Ava, her close friend from Bridges. While in June Niki said she was not going to have a social life in college, she quickly realized it was vital to

become involved in activities and develop a network of friends. Within a month she and Ava had joined the Caribbean Culture Club and the African People's Organization. Niki found her classes to be smaller than she had expected, but unfortunately she felt that she was not learning much. She complained that her Reading and Interpretation professor spent much of the class "talking about her own problems;" her Western Civilization professor delivered long lectures of disconnected facts; and her art professor was "racist" and gave her little to no feedback. Her English class was the most satisfying, principally because her professor was impressed with her writing and often used her work as a model. What most took Niki by surprise in her transition to college were the financial issues she immediately began to face. She could not attend freshmen orientation because it cost extra money; her TAP money was late because of paperwork problems; and while she had not planned to take out loans, she had to take out three. The stress of financial issues took up more energy than she had ever anticipated, "I was so worried about [money], I wasn't even thinking about anything else." Within her first month Niki had begun to face her greatest challenge: balancing school work, financial responsibilities, and a social life.

Wesley was also where he expected to be – at a "very competitive" private college on Long Island. He immediately became friends with one of his roommates, an African American student from New Jersey, but sensed his other roommate, who was White, was uncomfortable living with two African Americans. Wesley immediately dove head first into college life, as indicated by his first email: "This week is homecoming so I will be busy…classes are good. I haven't been slacking off that much. I have an exam on Thursday for my economics class…I really don't have that much time to talk because I have to finish my accounting homework, then go to one of my club meetings and then go to see a movie. As you can see I'm a very busy man." Wesley was excited that he was being exposed to a whole new set of knowledge through his business classes and loved learning about things like bank reconciliations and the structure of corporations – "I just love the fact that when I wake up … each day… I don't know what I'm going to learn." Like Niki, Wesley's greatest struggle was around financial issues. Having been unclear on all of the steps of securing his aid, he almost lost his Perkins loans and was taken aback by the cost of books and other necessities for living on campus. He was beginning to experience the obstacles of being a low-income student at a private college. Though he loved his college, as early as October he was already worried about whether he would be able to return in the spring.

Teresa was not where she had expected to be in the fall. She was in college; but rather than attending the four-year "very competitive" CUNY she planned to, she was at a two-year "non-competitive" CUNY. Admitted to the four-year school through the SEEK program, she was required to attend a summer transition program. When, by August, she had not received information about the start of the program, she went to the college only to discover the program had left messages with her father and brother; classes had already begun and she was no longer eligible to attend.[87] Teresa spoke to everyone she could, but

[87] Teresa had passed the remedial reading and writing tests for CUNY, but not the remedial math exam. CUNY's remedial policy states that if a student has to take any remedial courses, they cannot attend a four-year CUNY unless it is through the SEEK program.

learned there was nothing she could do other than attend a two-year school, earn sixty credits, pass the remedial math exam, transfer, and then take an exam to apply the credits towards her major at the four-year school. "I was just so pissed," she explained. "And then I was pissed at my brother and my Dad. I know they don't speak any English but that was pretty important…I guess [my father] forgot [the messages]. Because once I get home, he's not there. He leaves at 2:30 [p.m.] to go to work [and returns] at one o'clock in the morning. I'm sleeping. We really didn't even have no time to talk. I would leave [for work] before he'll wake up [and be gone] from 8 until 5." Without missing a beat, however, Teresa registered for classes at the community college closest to her house and resolved to complete her Associates Degree quickly. She did not get involved in campus life, going to classes and then straight to work or home. She enjoyed some of her coursework, particularly her business class which had hands-on assignments, but struggled with her English professor who shunned student voice and her remedial math instructor who spoke limited English. As Teresa attempted to establish a rhythm to her days, she was most challenged by managing her three distinct lives – family, work, and school.

Maria's experience, at her residential "most competitive" private college, was already significantly different from the others. She was one of two Puerto Ricans in the freshmen class, surrounded by many classmates who had attended private prep schools. By the end of the first month, Maria believed she already knew all of the African American and Latino students on campus. She had become involved in campus activities – she was on the volleyball team and a part of La Unidad, a multi-cultural organization. Maria generally enjoyed her classes and was relieved to find her professors were accessible and that classes were small. Her challenges centered around two issues: feeling like an outsider and managing her new-found independence. She rarely spent time on the college green or other common spaces on campus. Instead, she ate Chinese food in her room alone "almost every meal" and, after a series of overt racist incidences on campus, found herself to be "scared…around White people at night." With regards to managing her newfound freedom, while Maria had spent her high school days in a highly structured environment – between Bridges' tightly packed schedule and her mother's strict rules – she was overwhelmed by her independence. She had created a very busy schedule taking on more than she could manage – four classes, three on-campus jobs, and volunteer work. She found herself staying up late, missing classes, and getting sick often. By the end of September she had already been kicked off the volleyball team for missing too many practices.

Charles was also at a predominately White "competitive" private college, though he lived at home. He had a mixed reaction to both the academic rigor of his college and the intellectual discourse among the students; on the one hand he felt "challenged" and "enthralled," and on the other he was intimidated to the point of being unable to participate in class discussions or complete written assignments. Having spent the summer in an HEOP transition program, he had already begun to grapple with what he described as "chronic writer's block" whereby he could not produce anything. Charles managed to work through his writer's block enough to complete his summer coursework, but, while he had hoped the problem would be cured by the fall, it was only exacerbated

when he began taking classes with "prestigious" "published" professors and non-HEOP students. When he managed to complete one paper and his writing professor gave him a C, any grain of confidence he had vanished. Rather than taking the initiative to get help, he found himself "wallowing in the pits of self doubt" and "fleeing campus" after class. In some ways he wished he lived on campus, but he simply could not afford it; as it was he was struggling to pay for his weekly transportation pass alongside the cost of books and food. Despite the setbacks, Charles was committed to persisting: "The basic fact that I can learn everything I want…that freedom makes it worth coming to school every day. You learn. This is the reason you come to school."

Malik's journey to begin college was perhaps the most tumultuous of all, but is representative of the plight of many low-income students of color, particularly Black males. While Malik intended to begin college in the fall at a "less competitive" SUNY, he postponed until spring for two reasons: money and an arrest for which he was later acquitted. [88] Over the summer his college informed him that his financial aid paper work had problems and so funding would not be available until the spring; he could either take out loans, pay out-of-pocket, or wait. Waiting, he felt, was his only option. Regarding his arrest, in June of his senior year of high school Malik was unjustly accused of assault. A Bridges teacher helped him to get a private lawyer pro-bono who was confident charges would be dropped, but he had to wait for a court date in late-October. Even if he had the financial aid to begin school, Malik knew he would be "distracted" by the unresolved arrest. As part of a family where most males had done jail-time, spending one night in a holding cell made Malik all the more anxious to begin college. He contemplated taking a course at a community college but dismissed the idea upon learning he could not get aid for it. When January arrived he could not wait to start, "My heart is pounding…I'm about to leave and I'm ready." He traveled far upstate with high hopes and big dreams. When he arrived, however, he found college was more of a struggle than he had anticipated, not because the classes were particularly hard but because of a combination of the campus culture and being far from home. While he had intended to get involved in on-campus clubs, he found there were few. Moreover, though he was financially-strained, he could not get a job.[89] He was also upset by the overabundance of fights, drugs, and alcohol and a general disregard for the "privilege" of being a college student. He had left the city to get away from "the ghetto" and found, despite being six hours away, he had not traveled far enough. Furthermore, while he was excited to start "learning," his classes were characterized by long lectures, little discussion, and no collaboration. He explained, "You read a book, the teacher talks about what happened in the chapter…that's it for the day… I'm not really learning about anything…It's not like I go to my room and think about it … [or] go to [my] room or talk to someone about it." College was not what Malik had expected it to be, but he was not ready to stop: "I don't want to quit on something that I've been itching and dying to do for a long time…if I give it up, then I'll be stuck."

* * *

[88] Nationwide, one in every twenty black males over the age of twenty are in prison (Human Rights Watch, 2000).

[89] Malik spoke to the EOP director to see if he could become a part of the program, but, although he qualified, he could not be admitted as a mid-year student.

Beating the Odds

Collectively these six graduates' experiences begin to reveal what low-income students of color are up against in transitioning into and persisting through college. The question is: To what degree are Bridges graduates overcoming these – and other – obstacles? While college-going has increased significantly, with approximately 75% of high school graduates beginning college within two years of graduation (Education Trust, 2001), graduation rates have not kept apace; only 28.4% of Americans ages 25-29 have earned a BA or more (US Census Bureau, 2004). Furthermore, while there is not a large gap in who attends college with regards to race and ethnicity – 86% of Asian high school graduates enroll, as do 76% of Whites, 71% of African-Americans, and 71% of Latinos (Adelman, 1999)– this is not the case for completion rates. One in six African-American and Latino low-income students leave college within their first year, and one in three leave before the end of their second year (Swail, 2003). The result is that while 61.6% of Asians ages 25-29 have a BA or more, and 34.2% of Whites do; only 17.2% of African-Americans and 10% of Latinos do (US Census Bureau, 2004).[90]

The short answer to how well Bridges graduates do in higher education is that they persist in and through college at significantly higher rates than national averages. 35% of

[90] Looking at completion rates across colleges raises questions regarding what colleges are and are not doing to support graduates. As Carey (2005) argues some institutions serving similar populations "consistently outperform their peers." (p. 3) He shows that some institutions have graduation rates double those of others. For example SUNY Plattsburgh has a six-year graduation rate of 58.8% while Western Oregon University, with a similar student population, has a rate of 31%. When graduation rates are broken down by race, ethnicity, and gender, there is often an achievement gap but it is much greater at some colleges than others. Penn State, for example, has a graduation rate of 64.2% for African American students and an 83.4% graduation rate for white students. In comparison, Florida State, with a similar student population, has a 61.3% graduation rate for African American students and a 63.9% graduation rate for white students. (Carey, 2005) While Carey acknowledges that there are a host of factors outside of the control of colleges themselves that affect persistence, he argues, "[T]here is also a very big role of colleges and universities themselves." (p. 20). Unfortunately, he further adds, too few of them take this role seriously. This issue will be further explored in Chapter Seven.

Bridges graduates ages 22-24 have completed a BA – 35% of Latino graduates and 33% of Black graduates – with the expectation that this rate will rise as graduates reach the 25-29 age bracket. (See Table 1)

Table 1: College Persistence and Completion Nationwide vs. Bridges[91]

	National (Ages 25-29)	National Black[92] (Ages 25-29)	National Latino (Ages 25-29)	NYC (25 and over)	Bridges (Ages 22-24)[93]	Bridges Black (Ages 22-24)	Bridges Latino (Ages 22-24)
Some College[94]	57.4%	50.2%	31.1%	47.8%	82%	84%	83%
Associates[95]	12%	16%	19%	5.2%	13%	16%	16%
Bachelors	28.4	17.2%	10%	15.8%	35%	33%	34%

While these results are impressive in comparison to national averages, they are not the numbers small schools educators hope for when they set out to provide all of their students with, as Meier (2002a) defined it, "what you have always offered those who have the money to buy the best." (p. 49)

What lies beneath the numbers? Why are persistence rates for Bridges graduates higher than national averages, and why are they not as high as small schools educators hope for? This chapter begins to address these questions through a closer look at Niki's, Wesley's, Teresa's, Maria's, Charles', and Malik's first year journeys, situating them within larger trends of both Bridges graduates and low-income college students of color

[91] National numbers come from 2003 US Census data compiled in "Educational Attainment in the United States: 2003" (US Census Bureau, 2004), and New York City numbers come from 2000 US Census data compiled in Census 2000 Summary File (US Census Bureau, 2000).
[92] "Black" is defined as African American and Caribbean American.
[93] Statistics on "Some College" derived from sample of 90 – the graduating classes of 1999, 2000, 2001; statistics on Associates and Bachelors completion derived from sample of 60, as the class of 2001, when surveyed, had not been in out of high school long enough for degree completion.
[94] "Some College" is defined as one or more years and includes those with Associates and Bachelors.
[95] Includes occupational and academic Associates degrees.

nationwide.[96] While there were times during the academic year of 2002-2003 that Niki, Wesley, Teresa, Maria, Charles and Malik *all* wanted to leave, none of them did. Exploring the moments that they thought about leaving, and the forces that made them stay, provides a window into the question of whether or not Bridges *did enough* to prepare their graduates for college and at the same time helps to illuminate the ways in which secondary schools, on their own, can never do enough.

While individual experiences varied, all graduates displayed strong aspirations to complete college and had shared struggles, among them: a shift in how teaching was done and how school community was defined; uphill battles with the finances of college; and questions of how, and if, to integrate into college life. All of these transitions required them to continually confront the questions that many first-generation low-income students of color face: Do I belong in college? Is there a place for me in higher education? Does this institution *want* me – and furthermore, does it want me to succeed? Together, their stories are evidence of the power of small schools as well as the complexity of their mission given the enormous obstacles they and their students face.

Using Bridges teachers' questions, coupled with what emerged as most salient in graduates' journeys, Part I of this chapter addresses whether and how graduates were prepared academically for college; in doing so it raises further questions about what it means to be prepared academically for higher education, particularly when looking at a cross-section of post-secondary institutions. Part II addresses whether and how graduates were prepared for "the whole thing that is not academic" –specifically the finances of going to college and integration into "college life." Underpinning both parts of the

[96] In hopes of avoiding the confusion of following too many stories, I have only named those graduates in the cohort of six. The only exception to this is Ava, Niki's roommate, who plays a role in many of Niki's narrations of college.

chapter is an analysis of how graduates' expectations of college matched the realities of it, as well as what helped graduates to navigate the terrain, including both individual and institutional agency.

Part I
Are Bridges Graduates Ready Academically – and Ready for What?

At the forefront of Bridges teachers' minds is how prepared their students are *academically* for college, particularly as they design their coursework with the explicit goal of getting them ready to do "college level" work. While persistence rates provide one indication – especially given that research indicates that academic rigor is the best indicator of college completion (Adelman, 1999) – given the number of other factors at play, these rates are not enough to answer their questions. Furthermore, even the question of academic preparation leads to layers of unanticipated complexity. There are really three questions in need of answers: 1) What *is* the work college students are expected to do? 2) How prepared are graduates to meet the standards of college? 3) How do college professors and classes help students to learn and master that work?

What is "College-Level" Work?

> *"For the most part people are not really defining 'college prep." – Patrick M. Callan, President of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education* (Olson, 2006)

While academic preparation is critical to student success in college, there is not a clear consensus about what constitutes "college-level work." Though it is often talked about as a standard in-and-of-itself, and several researchers have argued that the central reason for low college graduation rates is a disjuncture between K-12 and college standards (Conley, 2005; Kirst & Venezia, 2004; Venezia et al, 2003), such an approach ignores the reality that there is a range of meanings of college level work within

America's system of higher education, resulting in a lack of consensus regarding the skills and knowledge necessary for "college-level" study (Abraham, 1987; Olson, 2006).[97] As Michael Kirst argued, "In an institution with five levels of college English and three levels of remedial reading…'which one is college-ready?'" (Olson, 2006) For Bridges graduates college-ready meant many things. For Charles it was being able to read and understand 4-6 scholarly texts a semester; for Niki it was being able to read and understand excerpts of philosophers contained in an annotated textbook; and for Teresa it was being able to pass a college-wide standardized writing exam required of all students for graduation.

What happened inside of college classrooms across campuses was once relatively uniform – when there were fewer colleges and a smaller number of Americans attending college – however the landscape of higher education has changed. The result of widened access to college is that, similar to the K-12 system, academic experiences often vary in accordance with the social class of student populations. As Bowles and Gintis argued,

> Higher education has developed a multi-tiered system dominated at the top by Ivy League institutions and the great state universities, followed by the less prestigious state universities, state colleges, and ending with the community colleges. The system reflects both the social status of the families of the students and the hierarchy of work relationships into which each type of student will move after graduation. (p. 209)

In colleges and high schools alike these differences are reflected in course content, assessments, and methods. For example while private high schools and elite public ones have classrooms focused on critical thinking and student voice, those serving low-income students are more focused on rote learning and testing, often at the expense of critical and

[97] Conley (2005) surveyed 400 faculty and staff members from twenty research universities and established "Understanding University Success" (2003), a comprehensive list of the knowledge and skills needed for college. Abraham, however, tried to do the same at 489 public two and four year colleges across fifteen states and was unable to come to consensus.

analytic skills (Anyon, 1980; Cookson & Persell, 1985; Toch, 2003). Aronowitz (2000) argues the same is true of higher education,

> Only the leading schools…provide space for the esoteric knowledge generated by the humanists…The main task of the public four-year and community colleges [is] to transmit technical knowledge to future employers of the U.S. labor market. (p. 39)

In a set of reflective notes from mid-way through Bridges graduates' first year of college, these trends became clear as they played out across graduates' academic experiences. While they had once shared the same educational experiences and goals, they were now in starkly different worlds from one another.

> *November, 2002*
> *On recent visits to five different colleges, I witnessed five different definitions of post-secondary education. At an elite private liberal arts school, students engaged in intellectual discussion about an ethnography they had read that addressed the power dynamics inherent in doctor-patient relationships as they prepared to conduct their own ethnographic research; all but one student was White and the majority were from middle or upper middle class backgrounds.*[98] *At a less elite but still private college, students copied down every disconnected fact their Western Civilization professor scrawled on the board in preparation for their fill-in the blank quizzes and multiple choice test; the students there were racially mixed and from working and middle class backgrounds. And at a public two-year school, groups of students made presentations on the business plans they had devised, without the use of technology; most were for clothing companies or nightclubs. The students were all African-American, Latino or recent immigrants from working class or poor backgrounds…There should not be one word for what we call 'college.'*

How Prepared were Bridges Graduates for the Academics of College?

> *"Consortium*[99] *[small school] graduates do very well in college. Most attend four-year colleges…[and] earn on average a 2.6 GPA…upon completion of three semesters. [Note: The ACT defines college readiness ability to earn…at least a 2.0 GPA in college-level courses.] Consortium students remain in college as well, with 84% of those attending four-year colleges and 59% of those attending two-year institutions returning for a second year…These results indicate that Consortium*

[98] Students' class backgrounds, as described here, were surmised by a combination of the make-up of student population at the colleges and the appearance – language and dress – of students.
[99] "Consortium" refers to those small schools that are a part of the New York Performance Standards Consortium.

> *schools effectively prepare their students – mostly African-American and Latino and economically disadvantaged – for college level work."* (Foote, 2006, pp. 4-5)

Given the range of academic expectations in higher education, coupled with the data collected for this study, it can be argued that most of Bridges graduates were academically prepared for some level of college-work; however, Bridges teachers – and other small schools educators, students, and parents – deserve a more comprehensive and nuanced answer than this. Despite the difficulties of defining exactly what it means to prepare students for college, and regardless of the specific standards at each college, all Bridges graduates did have to demonstrate a host of general skills, namely proficiency in reading, writing, math, test-taking, and managing academic demands with effective work habits.[100]

Most graduates interviewed or surveyed highlighted that they were remarkably well prepared in the area of writing. Several boasted that they were significantly more prepared than their classmates who had written less in high school and for whom even short essays were a struggle. For Bridges graduates writing assignments were not only manageable; they almost always did well.[101] They credited this to what they learned at

[100] Content knowledge did not seem to be an issue for Bridges graduates, except for those attending the most competitive colleges where their classmates had not only taken multiple AP courses but also grew up in homes that left them with cultural capital and knowledge gained through experiences to which Bridges students had limited or no access. One graduate wished she could talk about cubism; another was stupefied by the vocabulary of his classmates; and a third was convinced she could never "catch up." It should be noted, however, that Bridges graduates also highlighted those moments that they felt particularly good because they had prior knowledge about what was being studied in a college course; it gave them confidence in their high school preparation and it made them feel like they belonged in college.

[101] While those graduates attending the "most competitive" colleges struggled with writing in comparison to their peers – many of whom came from the country's top private and public high schools – they had the skills they needed to both pass and further advance their writing to where they needed to be.

Bridges. Niki, who was asked to help other students in her class with their writing explained: [102]

> When I was at Bridges I was so uncomfortable because…so much was expected. Now that I get here, because of being pushed and asked to write so much I'm comfortable with writing…Everybody will be asking me, what do you think my paper needs and I feel proud of myself...being the only person of color and knowing more than they know, it makes me *even* more proud of myself. Every time I come in that class, I'm just so happy.[103]

Bridges graduates also highlighted that they felt well prepared with both oral communication and critical thinking skills, though many also emphasized that they did not have to use these as often as they would have liked. While Conley (2005) argues that most college professors are looking for such skills – and that it is the greatest disconnect between K-12 and higher education – many Bridges graduates found just the opposite. In fact, they wished more of their professors demanded critical thinking in class, and that more students engaged in it. [104] Niki had come to believe that in college "classes are really about regurgitating the important information that was taught to you." While she had gone into college emphasizing the importance of critical thinking and analysis in the learning process, she found that she was "hardly ever" asked to do analysis or define her point of view. One graduate, at a highly competitive college explained,

> The majority of people in this school, they have their work, they study it, they do it, and that's it. Instead of us, we have to question everything…and we're all

[102] Several Bridges graduates noted they were asked to take this role within their classes; two, who were part of an EOP program, were asked to conduct a lesson on how to structure an essay in summer "bridge" class on writing.

[103] While Niki's college had a large population of students of color, she took classes with other PASS students. Niki explained that there were few students of color in this program; she believed most students of color in need of academic support were in the EOP program, while the PASS program served White students – many of whom came from middle class backgrounds but had low test scores. She also noted quite a few had parents who worked in some capacity on campus and others were on the college's sports teams.

[104] This issue will be further explored later in the chapter.

> theoretical – why this or why that. These people [are] like, 'Who cares? I'm just going to read it, study it, and do it.'[105]

Where Bridges graduates felt less prepared were in the areas of math, test-taking, and academic independence. Regarding math, this was anticipated by one math teacher interviewed who highlighted that it took Bridges a long time to get a rigorous math curriculum in place and to have consistent expertise among the teachers to implement it well. [106] The problem of getting – and keeping – experienced and qualified math teachers, has been a problem for Bridges , as it is for most other urban public schools (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996).

Research shows that test-taking is an area that is generally more challenging for students of color for a variety of reasons (see Gould, 1996 and Steele, 1999). This fact, coupled with Bridges' stance against standardized testing and use of performance-based assessment, which in the school's early years often meant an absence of even teacher-designed tests, resulted in graduates feeling under-prepared for what was often the dominant and sometimes sole means of assessment in college. As one graduate, a student at a non-competitive community college said, "I wasn't used to taking tests…you have to [prepare] students for that. Because when you go to college that's all they look at. My accounting class, you have three scores. You don't even have to come. Just pass those three tests." Exacerbating insecurities around exam taking for students at the most competitive schools was the fact that most of their classmates attended from the country's

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[105] The issue of the ways in which critical thinking was – or was not – expected of students in college, and their reactions to this, will be further explored later in the chapter within a section on pedagogy in higher education.

[106] While there are mandated math curricula within New York City, Bridges is a part of a group of schools that are free from such mandates allowing them to use other approaches. That said, in New York City mandated math curriculum has changed so many times that some high school students have had four different approaches across their four years of high school.

top private and public schools, came from college-educated families, and boasted high SAT scores.

Among the greatest concerns for Bridges staff, as indicated in Chapter 4, was whether or not graduates were prepared to manage academic demands with effective work habits – whether they would have the independence and discipline to meet deadlines, manage their time, and take the initiative to get help when no one told them to. While graduates also worried about and anticipated this challenge each was surprised by the reality of it. For some, particularly those at more competitive colleges, the workload was daunting. Maria explained that while at Bridges she had a month or two to read a book, in college she had a week and while in high school she was guided through a writing and revision process, in college she was told to "write a paper." She recounted,

> It's not so much that it was challenging, but the fact that it was so much. To have four classes all throwing papers at you at the same time and you have to have at least five books or something from each class…Most of my classes were paper writing, not tests...it was a lot of writing. It was kind of hard that I had to do all of that in one shot.

For other graduates the difficulties centered on managing time and completing work outside of class. At Bridges they had no free periods to go to the library or time within classes to work on major assignments; in college they either had, as Malik put it, "too much time on your hands" or not enough between classes, work and other responsibilities. Wesley found that his roommate, who attended a large comprehensive suburban high school, was able to manage his time better having already had to choose among classes, manage free periods, and juggle several extra curricular activities. Coming from a small school, on the other hand, Wesley had always had his schedules handed to him – he had a choice of an elective only in his senior year, and his schedule

was always packed with extended block periods and advisory. Referring to his time at Bridges, he explained, "Everything was already done for us. We just went to class." Maria, who attended college with many students who had gone to boarding schools, also found that independence for them began when they were much younger. She explained, "They just seemed more relaxed, open to have fun, and then they buckled down when it came time for them to do a paper."

Having had both teachers and advisors there to assist them in high school, most graduates – other than those who were part of Opportunity Programs[107] – were also unprepared for the lack of guidance and support in college. Most had advisors, but few ever met with them other than to sign their registration forms. The real difference between high school and college, Wesley argued, was accessing help. While in high school teachers were "always there to help you" and continually questioned whether everyone "got it;" that was not the case in college. One graduate explained, "There's no one telling you what to do…no one telling you to go to class…your professors aren't pulling you aside and saying you need to fix this, this and that." Making these new expectations even more difficult was that unlike their middle-class peers coming from college-educated families, they did not go to college with a host of supports at home. As first-generation college-goers they could not email their papers to their parents for revisions or turn to them for advice on course selection; and few believed they could even turn to their parents to see them through their crises about staying in college.

Those graduates who were in colleges where help was more readily available and/or who sought out help were more likely to persist. At the same time, that was not always

[107] The ways in which the college experiences of those students enrolled through Opportunity Programs will be explored later in this chapter.

enough. For example, Teresa, having learned that feedback and revision are part of the writing process, took the initiative to show professors drafts. Unfortunately, their feedback was often too limited: "I'm like 'Professor, look at this real quick ... just tell me what you think.' And he would tell me real quick…'Keep on going,' or 'Don't keep on going.'"[108] One graduate, after recounting the lack of help from professors, the lack of general advising, and the overall loneliness of being the first in one's family to attend college, concluded in frustration, "We have nothing to lean back on."[109]

While Bridges graduates appreciated that their high school had a student body with diverse needs, they found themselves wishing it had been more like college – that it had not "babied them" as much as it had. "At Bridges they pay attention to every single kid," Teresa explained, "but then think about it. Not every single kid needs your attention…Bridges sees the process of each child…so once you see how they're doing, who's strong and who's weak, who can handle it and who can't…you can help them." The graduates themselves recognized the dilemma inherent in Bridges providing the support critical for many students to complete high school within a college prep curriculum, while at the same time preparing them for the realities of college. Charles explained,

> Bridges' coddling has ruined me forever. And I loved it. I loved that teachers cared about you, and I loved that if you showed enough of a talent, they were going to help you strengthen it…These professors don't care about you…and you're going to be lost because you don't have that support network…Bridges doesn't prepare you

[108] The reality is that particularly at Teresa's college, a two-year public school, professors are underpaid and often do not have the time – between their courses and other work – to review drafts of students' work. One tenured professor at a "most competitive" college, which pays significantly more than public two-year colleges, explained that even she was unable to offer to look at drafts because of her time pressures around publication, her overall course responsibilities, and her personal life.

[109] Another graduate within this same focus group emphasized the important role his sister – who had attended and graduated from college already – played throughout his journey. She was the one who took his phone calls with questions about everything from financial aid, to course registration, to majors, to help with papers.

> for just being treated as something of insignificance…[But Bridges shouldn't change because] then it will become the normal public school without Regents…It will just be students coming in only really wanting to socialize and not caring about teachers who teach from a handbook…Bridges will die without that personality and caring.

Pedagogy: How do College Professors and Classes Help Students to Learn and Master Academic Work?

"[The professor would] write everything and we'd have to regurgitate it then, instead of us making connections... and stuff like that. I feel dumb, like he's telling me I'm not capable of thinking in that type of way." – Niki

The lack of caring and guidance graduates talked about is emblematic of a deeper obstacle most faced in their transition to college: a shift in what defined classroom practice and student-teacher relationships. Before attending college Bridges graduates were clear that a good education included discussion-based classes, opportunities to develop and express opinions, collaboration among students, relationships with teachers, and a focus on critical thinking and problem solving. Having come from a school where teachers had paid extra attention to such things, they worried that college, where pedagogy is given less attention (Swail et al, 2003; Tinto, 1997; Treisman, 1992), would not be like this. The reality is that while the classroom experiences has the potential to be a critical space through which college student engagement can be developed and persistence encouraged, it is unfortunately seldom an area of focus in higher education; classroom learning is more often than not a "spectator sport" (Fischer & Grant, 1983 in Tinto 1997).

Most Bridges graduates who were interviewed[110] were troubled by what they found within their college classes, and for many it presented a tremendous barrier to persistence. Experiences ranged both across and within institutions, with most students

[110] This includes the six who were followed as well as those interviewed once within a focus group or one-on-one.

having some positive moments. Those attending the more competitive and elite colleges were more likely to describe their classes as spaces where they were intellectually engaged. Maria spoke with excitement about her American Studies professor who often made connections between the material they were studying and other issues and about her Hebrew Bible class where "we were actually discussing [Psalm 116] and the professor wanted to know our thoughts about it." Similarly, Charles' classes elicited student voice and critical thinking. In one class, where students sat in a circle discussing an assigned text, the professor noted, "If you're having a hard time sharing, but want me to know you're doing the reading, come and talk to me – but I do want everyone to feel comfortable talking;" all but one student in this class of ten spoke. One graduate, a senior at a private highly competitive college, explained, "At my school, you see the professors in the cafeteria, professors have students over at their houses all of the time."

Those students whose studies were career-focused were also particularly enthusiastic about some of their classes. Wesley and Teresa spoke with excitement about their business classes, Wesley because he was learning new concepts[111] and Teresa because that was where she was doing the most hands-on assignments. In one class Teresa completed a group project – a business marketing plan – with three other students and presented to the class. Not only was her professor affirming of the work, commenting, "I'm learning through a lot of you," her classmates were too; one said, "I'm amazed because we're all imagining things and really doing it – it seems real. This is a good class."

[111] Wesley pointed out that he felt particularly relieved to be in a major where he was not expected to come in with much prior knowledge; most students do not learn about mergers and acquisitions or corporations while in high school, and so he did not have to feel behind in the way he might have if he had pursued a history major, for example.

While these examples, in many respects, correlate with Bridges approach to teaching and its emphasis on critical thinking, such examples of practice were few and far between, even for students at more elite colleges. Overwhelmingly, students' experiences were marked by frustrations around teacher-centered approaches to learning and a movement away from student-teacher relationships and towards anonymity.

Graduates were frustrated with how little their opinion mattered and how infrequently – if at all – they were asked to dialogue with their classmates. One graduate in her senior year at a highly competitive SUNY used her understanding of Paulo Freire to summarize her classes: "The professor just stands there and whatever he teachers, that's correct – whatever he feeds into you, that's correct – you have no say-so …You're the bank." She resented having to transition from to an education that sought to raise her curiosity and strengthen her habits of mind to one which expected little other than the correct answers. Another graduate likened professors to "the Queen Elizabeth at the front of the room" and concluded, "You could tell [the professor] what you think, but he's ultimately not going to listen to you…You go to office hours, they don't care about what you think."

Niki's Western Civilization class illustrated these dynamics.[112] The professor wrote down everything on the board, in outline form, that students were to write in their notes. One set of notes read, "3. Louis IV; a) Revokes Edict of Nantes; b) France is a country with 'Un Roi, Un Foi, Un Loi." All information presented was discrete facts and jumped from one topic to another. No questions were asked by the students, other than to repeat what the professor said or to clarify illegible words on the board. Most students took

[112] The description of this class is derived from field notes I took when visiting Niki for the day and attending the class alongside her.

notes, though a couple slept and one played with his cell phone (which rang at one point, but there was no reaction). Once a student made a connection to John Walker Lind when the lecture turned to treason, but the professor did not engage in a discussion about this connection. He stopped the lecture only to review for an upcoming quiz, which he did in the format of jeopardy and did not appear to listen for the scattered responses around the room. For example, he said, "Language not written – spoken form." One student answered, "vernacular." The professor said, "No, vernacular." Twenty-five minutes into the class Niki commented, "Are you bored yet?"

Niki's response to this situation was similar to others; she was both frustrated and felt insulted by this new approach. At Bridges she had been asked to make sense of content for herself, make connections, develop opinions – think critically – but this seemed besides the point in college. Her interpretation of being asked only to memorize was that her professors did not think students *could* do such thinking. She explained:

> [The professor would] write everything and we'd have to regurgitate it then, instead of us making connections to everyday life and stuff like that. I feel dumb, like he's telling me I'm not capable of thinking in that type of way…I felt like I was regurgitating everything. It was just like, blah, here we go. And…I didn't really *know*. It's like I don't know what I ate, but I'm just throwing it back up so you can see it…That's how I felt. It wasn't…like okay, I can tell you what I ate and just explain to you what I ate and how it tasted…that's how I felt [at Bridges]… everything stuck.

Other graduates were similarly disappointed by such pedagogical changes. Maria explained, "We don't really have debates… Most of the time you've just got to listen and write down what they are saying." Malik questioned why his business professor simply repeated things out of the book they had just read for homework. One graduate, who attended a "competitive" college in Massachusetts, explained his history teacher announced he did not " believe in new-age teaching…discussion-based classes" and so

students spent class copying transparencies off the board, memorizing 17 subject outlines to recall on exams, and rarely engaging in history.[113]

Graduates complained of having books assigned about which they had little or no in-class discussion. Charles commented, "I was knocked over by these silences...my professor comes off of lecture mode, and you'll hear the buzz of the lights." And many yearned for more group work. Wesley, having come to believe that collaboration was critical not only to understanding but also to helping students cross boundaries they otherwise would not cross, explained:

> The skill..working as a team…I wasn't able to use it that much in college. When you're in class in college it's just totally different from high school, because when you're in college class, you see people that you normally don't see them around campus and you don't really communicate with them that much. And it depends on the professor … but for the most part, you're on your own...a lot of people was not willing to work together. ..that's something that I'm kind of sad we don't use in college. Because, like you could tell in my school...it's not racist, but there's a gap between the ethnicities and, like minorities hang around with other minorities and Caucasians [with Caucasians]...I think, because people don't communicate as much… if you work in groups in classrooms, you would be able to bridge that gap and bring people together.

Teresa did have some opportunities for group work, but it was not a part of classroom culture or facilitated well enough by professors well enough to be effective. She recalled one typical experience, "I would start it off : 'So, for question number one, what did you think?' 'Oh, I didn't think anything.' 'What did you think?' 'I didn't read it.' 'Okay.' 'Hello, what do you think?' 'Oh, I'm sorry. What did you say?' That's what I was dealing with."

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[113] Having visited one of these classes I was particularly distressed to see how disengaged students were in the class and even more so to observe this Bridges graduate, whom I knew to be excited about and engaged in history while in high school. No one spoke during the class, and no one spoke about the content of the class as they left the room.

Given these new pedagogical dynamics, several of the graduates questioned, in general, just how important *understanding* was to their professors and to their success in college. Wesley was baffled by the practice of an accounting professor who simply curved all of the exams; Wesley understood little of what was taught in that class but scored 80's and above on tests. Teresa described her professor's approach to assessment: students take a series of quizzes; whoever gets 100 points, cumulative, before the final, does not have to take the final; students have the option of going for "double or nothing" – on the top of each quiz they write if they are taking the gamble; whoever who get all of the answers correct gets their score doubled, but those who get only some correct get no points. And Niki concluded,

> What I realize [about college] is that they don't teach you anything…If you didn't know it before you got to college, you either have to learn it [on your own] or you won't ever know it. They don't go backwards. They assume that you know stuff and if you don't know it that's not their problem – it's like, well you should have went to a better high school. That's kind of what their mentality is…You have to teach yourself. They build on what you already know or what they think you already know.

This approach, coupled with professors not knowing their students, was especially troublesome to Bridges graduates. Having attended Bridges did help graduates to form relationships in college. As Teresa argued, "The way Bridges students get to know the teacher, that's good. Because you kind of build a relationship with the professors, and you're not afraid of stepping up to them or going to talk to them or anything like that;" but the ability to do this varied across students and across institutions. Charles, who was intimidated by the professors as well as other students, felt crushed, and angered, by what he perceived to be the place of students in the lives of professors. "It isn't part of [a professor's] job [to get to know us]. It's that they were straightforward about that from

the beginning," he explained. In grappling with this new relationship between student and professor, Charles found himself most frustrated by a power dynamic he had not previously experienced –the professor held all, if not most, of the power and student held little. This made it all the more difficult to approach them and he craved, most of all, interactions that were not limited to class time and office hours, emphasizing, "I really dread the words office hours." Another graduate concurred, explaining that she was put off by professors who told her to come to office hours instead of answering her questions during or after class. She lamented,

> Only one of my professors treated us like *students*. Like we didn't know everything. We're going to college to learn… you can't just give us a piece of paper and we're supposed to know it. And that's how most of the teachers were. Like, they would go over stuff. 'You have questions? Ask me after the class.'…After that, I didn't want to ask a question. I felt like you just brushed me off. Why you couldn't explain it during class. I probably wasn't the only one that didn't understand. And they would still be like…I don't want to set up appointment, I have a problem now.

Generally, most Bridges graduates were left feeling like "a number" in college or "just another student." Coming from Bridges this transition was jarring. As Malik explained,

> At Bridges it was a little community…you're the big fish of the community. All the teachers know you…all the students know you…in college…it's nothing like [that]...you're not really that special…You can be the smartest kid on campus, and people really don't care…I wanted to get that relationships with my professors…[but] the door wasn't open…I know a lot of students who have felt like that…the teacher doesn't have time for that. [114]

[114] The comments of Charles and others might lead one to wonder whether Bridges disserves its students by developing unrealistic expectations of education for them. However, these standards are no different from what students at small private schools come to expect. The difference is that many of these students have family members who continue to help them with their work while in college and support them in a variety of ways towards completion (Bloom, 2006; Cookson & Persell, 1985). Moreover, they tend to attend small private colleges where their expectations are more often met, face little financial stress, and are surrounded by others from similar backgrounds to themselves.

The overall impact of this new approach to education was that several Bridges graduates were left wondering whether college was "worth it" if they really were not learning very much. Those who could sought out classes that would be more similar to those they had taken at Bridges; one graduate, after taking an English class with 300 students resolved to only take classes like that if it was absolutely necessary. Others created small learning communities for themselves – taking classes with friends, forming study groups, and the like. Others, however, found themselves wondering how much longer they could persist. One graduate commented, "Some of the classes are really bad…I just don't want to be there…I'm not that excited about the teaching." He was not alone in this questioning. Malik became clear that he wanted college to be about more than just credentialing, commenting,

> I'm not really sure I'm really learning anything, as far as like academic-wise…it's just like basically I went up to [college] just to do the two years, just to get the Associate… degree. That's what it feels like I'm just doing….It doesn't feel like I'm learning anything, right? It's kind of bad…I'm up there just to get the degree.

While the credential might be why many people turn to college what graduates of Bridges were finding was that credentialing alone was not enough. They needed – and wanted – to be part of an intellectual community where they were learning, discussing, exploring and discovering new ideas. This was one of the things they had expected from college; without it, where was the immediate satisfaction and ultimately the on-going incentive to take out loans and forgo income to stay in college?

Part II
Are Bridges Graduates Ready for "the whole thing that is not academic"?

With college persistence and graduation rates above average for Bridges graduates, but still not as good as many small schools educators hope, what were the other obstacles

graduates faced that fell outside of academic preparation? How did these obstacles intersect with the academic ones? In what ways did they catch graduates by surprise and in what ways were they prepared to navigate them? Before going to college, graduates had some ideas, however incomplete, of what college life would be like and held their own beliefs about how they would want to fit in, or not, to that life. Understanding the ways in which their expectations were and were not met, as well as the multitude of factors that came their way, helps to further unearth the complexity of their journeys and of Bridges' college-for-all mission.

Money and College

> *"You have problems with everything here, and...it always comes back to money." – Niki*

While Bridges graduates chose their colleges based mostly on the financial aid packages they had been given, and while most believed they were in control of at least their tuition, before going to college all of them worried to some degree about money. As they transitioned into higher education, their concerns were quickly realized; almost immediately many began to struggle with tuition, aid, and a host of unanticipated costs. While on the most basic level financial issues present issues around persistence for any college student, for low-income students the issues run especially deep. Each financial obstacle made more poignant the same two questions graduates found themselves asking with regards to academics: *Is college worth it? Do I belong?*

Within their first year of college, Bridges graduates' experiences reveal just how much of a challenge finances are for low-income college students. While many of their teachers had assured them that there would be plenty of financial aid money, work study, and scholarships available to help finance college, these assurances did not come to

fruition. Compounding this, Bridges graduates' limited awareness and understanding of these issues resulted in many being caught by surprise by the actual costs of college. Within their first year they confronted a host of logistical, academic, emotional and psychological issues related to finances, among them: misunderstanding their aid packages, unexpected costs, juggling jobs alongside coursework, rising tuition, and the constant worry of not being able to return the next semester.

(Mis)Understanding Tuition and the Consequences

> *"I thought I had the financial aspect all cool…I was just going to focus on my work. I got my little billing statement and it's not going to be cool…Now I have even more to think about." – Graduate*[115]

Before the graduates even began classes, it became clear that despite their initial attention to their financial aid packages, they and their families were not entirely clear about exactly what those packages were offering. Comparing a package that left a student paying $4,000 rather than $8,000 seemed good back in the spring, but what did it actually mean to take out a $4,000 loan? What was the difference between a subsidized and an unsubsidized loan? Do grants have to be paid back? While these are important details, they are often lost on low-income students and their families, particularly those who are first-generation to attend college (Bloom, 2005).

Wesley was one of many graduates taken aback by what he actually had to pay for his first semester of college. In August his mother said she was "confused and surprised" by a bill for $1,500 and a notice that she would have to pay another bill come October. During an interview, she pulled out Wesley's aid package and asked for an explanation of what was on it.

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[115] When "Graduate" is person quote is attributed to (as opposed to Charles, Malik, Maria, Niki, Teresa, or Wesley), it indicates the quote is from a graduate who was either a part of the survey sample or was interviewed through a one-time focus group or one-on-one interview.

August 13, 2002
Lori: Stafford loan, TAP award, Perkins loan, Pell grant. Can I mark on this?
Mom: Uh huh.
Lori: So you know that..this he doesn't have to pay back...because it's a grant.
Mom: Okay.
Lori: This is a loan he does have to pay back.
Mom: Okay.
Lori: When he finishes. But he doesn't have to do anything until he graduates. Like if Wesley stopped going to college for any reason, as soon as he stops, whether it's because he graduates or because he decides to leave school, then he starts getting interest… I don't understand why you had to pay fifteen hundred dollars, because it says tuitions and fees is $8,690… here's tuition and fees...so you'd have to pay $250 for the fee deposit, right. And then for financial aid, he's getting over $9,000.
Mom: Well, I sent them $1,541... Wesley, why did I send the fifteen hundred dollars?
Wesley: I told you to send it…They sent me a statement on a piece of paper like this. It was their fall payment. And I tore this off…I don't know why…
Lori: … Do you have the statement that they sent you? The other one?
Wesley: This was a long time ago.

Another graduate, who attended a private college, had a similar experience. She explained:

> I thought I had the financial aspect all cool, and it was going to be really easy. All I was going to do was just focus on my work. And I got my little billing statement that told me it's not going to be cool, it's not going to be easy, and I need to find ways to figure that out, too. So, now I have even more to think about…I thought I filled out everything right…I guess I didn't, or they read it wrong, or they did something. But once they calculated everything on the actual statement, it's like I owe mad money to [the college]. And I read on the back or somewhere that said if I don't pay it by the due date [which is in three days] that I'm not going to be able to register for spring classes. And it's going to suck for me.

The result was that many Bridges graduates had to take out loans they had not planned to, and on a deeper level some personalized the issue, wondering whether their college really *wanted* them. Malik got to school thinking "financial aid would cover everything" only to discover it would not. Assuming this was a commentary on the school's interest in *him*, he remarked to his mother, "They're trying to kick me out of school." The only way for Malik to stay was to take out two loans. Niki had a similar

situation. Believing, like many other first-generation students, that her parents knew little about college, she tried to manage the application and financial process on her own (Knight, 2004; McDonough, 1997). In the midst of completing high school and working a summer job, she threw too many important papers into a drawer and lost others in the shuffle. The result was that, come August, Niki turned to her parents in a panic because she received a call from the college saying she owed one-thousand dollars. In the end, as Niki explained, "I swore to myself that I would never take out a loan. And I took out three loans!"

The stress of owing money was exacerbated for students by the ways in which they would be penalized for having balances to pay off to their college, ultimately amounting to a tacit punishment for being from low-income backgrounds. Their divided attention between financial stresses and academics led to a dangerous paradox. They could not register for classes until their bill was paid, they could not receive their grades until their bill was paid, their housing could be taken away if their bill was not paid, and to add insult to injury they would be charged late fees if their bill was not paid. These realities told them that figuring out the financial issues demanded the most attention, yet they faced the added pressure that their aid would be further threatened if they failed a class. Thus they were caught in a vicious cycle. Graduates needed to do all they could to stay afloat financially, up to and including working two to three jobs, which led to increased stress and less time to focus on academics; at the same time, this created concern over failing classes, which would result in a loss of aid, and thus resulted in increased stress around finances.

Plenty of graduates looked for support with financial issues, but while some, particularly those in Opportunity Programs, found it, many others did not. One student attending a SUNY through EOP explained, "We had our *own* financial aid counselor…[she] would help us with everything" – re-filing FAFSA forms, understanding packages, and guiding students to additional funding sources. Another graduate, however, attending the same SUNY but not within EOP explained his experiences: "We go to [the financial aide] office, and they take you by last name...and you go in there. They don't look at your face. 'What you want? Oh, we can't help you with that.'" Wesley, who had a similar experience to this, concluded, "They don't really think about the situations that we go through," he deduced. "They just want their money."

These types of experiences often defined graduates' campus experiences and led them to question not only whether they belonged but if they could remain at their college. For example, Wesley went to the financial aid office almost daily to check the computer to see his standing.[116] Worried about paper work mistakes and unexpected charges, he believed that if he did not take control of the process, no one else would. Furthermore, he had to figure out how he would pay his balance come second semester. While Wesley had assured his mother he would secure a scholarship, no such thing had come through and his mother was denied a parent loan. Wesley was forced to think about transferring, "I tried this hard to make it to college. I don't want to leave yet…I love this school," he admitted. In the end, in her eternal quest to find more scholarship sources for her son, Wesley's mother contacted a former social worker of his who offered to pay for the remainder of the tuition in exchange for Wesley working at her organization in the

[116] When I first visited Wesley on his campus, I asked him to take me to the places he spent a lot of time; rather than heading for the campus center or library, financial services was our first stop.

summer. Wesley was able to remain at his college rather than join many other low income students at private colleges who transfer to public ones (Paulsen & St. John, 2002), stop-out (Swail, 2003), or turn to two-year schools (McPherson & Schapiro, 1999).

(Mis)Understanding and Managing Other Costs of College

> *"This is not going to work, I can't afford anything. I don't have a computer, I can't afford my books, I can't pay for my lab classes." – Graduate*

In addition to being struck by tuition costs, graduates faced countless unanticipated expenses. The impact of these costs on students coming from families already stretched to the limit was enough to put some over the edge and once again made them face the question of whether college was worth it and whether they belonged. Buying books was not something most graduates had thought about or fully prepared for, which reflected further confusion about how aid works. In high school, after all, they were given books that were then returned. Now that they paid for school, weren't books included? Malik explained, "My mom said she said they thought [financial aid] or tuition paid for my books... I don't know if that's true. I want to look into that because I paid for books out of my own money." Furthermore, graduates were shocked by the actual cost of books. One at a small private liberal arts college recalled her first visit to the bookstore,

> Freshman year, I had a really hard time paying for things. I went to the bookstore and I literally got hysterical because I had eight hundred and ninety-four dollars worth of books…there was no way my mom could have afforded it on her own. I couldn't deal with it. I was just like this is not going to work, I can't afford anything. I don't have a computer, I can't afford my books, I can't pay for lab classes.

Several Bridges graduates carefully strategized around book buying, but never found a perfect solution. One explained that she asked her friends in the EOP program –

who did get book vouchers – to purchase her books for her, but their vouchers were limited. Others decided to share books with friends but then ran into difficulty when they both needed the text simultaneously. One graduate explained that, between her class and work schedules, the only time to study was in the evening, and she did not feel comfortable walking across campus late at night to retrieve the book from a friend. Others came to be very careful in deciding which books to buy. Niki was remarkably frustrated to discover they did not "even use half those books [on the syllabus]." And while all of the graduates counted on recouping some of their money when it was time to sell back their books, they were disappointed to learn how little you actually receive. "My Spanish book was a hundred and thirty-two dollars," Niki explained. "I was going to sell it back, and they was only going to give me ten dollars for it…It's a big rip-off."[117]

There were also other unanticipated expenses: transportation, health insurance, technology and lab fees, and the like. Students at residential colleges had not factored in the cost of returning home, and those far away regretted that oversight. Malik admitted, "I think I honestly took a school too far from home. If it was a little closer, I think it would be a little bit better…figuring that you need sixty dollars round trip to get back and forth." Those attending colleges in New York City were shocked by how much public transportation actually is. Having either walked to school or received transportation passes in high school, the weekly expense of taking the train at least twice a day was more than they had anticipated. Charles explained, "Paying my own fare - that's a big

[117] Several college students buy their books used through on-line services, but to do this one needs to have both a credit card and a mailing address where packages can be received. At one point Charles needed to buy a few more books for his courses but did not have the money to do so. I went on-line with him to see if he could purchase them for less money. He found several of them at greatly reduced prices, however he did not have a credit card to pay for them nor did he have a reliable mailing address to ship them to; he was never at home to receive packages, his cousin worked all day long, and his uncle was unreliable due to a severe drug habit. In the end, I used my credit card and mailing address to purchase the used books for Charles and applied the costs to his stipend for participating in the study.

thing in itself…I have to pay sixty dollars every month that I don't have for a metro card and go off to school, and [pay] for food and [pay] for survival." While Charles did receive a stipend from the HEOP program, it was never enough to cover both book and transportation costs.

For residential students there were also things like laundry supplies, deodorant, and pens. Niki kept an itemized list of her expenses during the *first month* of her second year of college. [118] It totaled $1,300.32 :

Laundry Supplies/Laundry: $29
Personal Hygiene/Care: $77.65
Clothing: $317.00
Interest Loan Bill: $138
Books: $280[119]
Food (for dorm room and out): $66.70
School/Computer Supplies: $124.97
Dorm Room Supplies: $30.00
Bursar's Bill: $406
Travel: $21
Social Events: $10

Niki explained just how hard it was to manage this new and unexpected reality, particularly given the larger economic stresses that surround her and her family's life. She and her mother were continually doing a dance to make sure everyone's bills were taken care of. Between the two of them they managed to get by, recognizing that they paid too much by credit card and making sacrifices that, without the expenses of a residential college, they would not have had to make.

> I had to pay for my books…Sometimes my meal card ran out… In the middle of the year, the teacher would ask for a book that she never asked for, and you'd have to go buy it… [I paid by] credit card. My mother helped me…my brother and sisters are little, they don't really ask for much… [and] the fact that my mother is on welfare, she gets like little bits of money. She just got I think like seven hundred dollars from my brother's school, because she's a low income parent … My mother [gets] Section 8, and she gets welfare. She doesn't get cash assistance but she gets food stamps… Section 8 pays for the majority of her rent. And the fact that my mother makes two-something, and it's not that much every week… out of every check to pay for the part of the rent that she owes….So we have like hundred and

[118] I have put the individual items into categories as the list was several pages long.
[119] On the hand-written list, Niki noted next to book costs: "No vouchers."

> fifty dollars to work with. So she'll take like maybe seventy-five dollars off the first check and fifty dollars off the second check to pay for my credit card when it comes in. And it's usually like three hundred dollars. And then, when I got my job, I was able to pay for a lot of the stuff…I was able to give my mother a little bit of money, because I was getting paid like three hundred dollars every two weeks.

For those students not away at college, socio-economic realities placed a distinct yet difficult set of obstacles in their way – from high unemployment rates to inequitable health care policies. Charles took time away from studying to help his mother manage her inadequate treatment for stage three breast cancer, and Teresa found herself failing two classes when her health insurance gave her limited flexibility in treating a painful tooth infection; she missed four sessions of both her English and Accounting classes.

Teresa's experiences in particular capture how the stresses of family life affect low-income college students living at home (London, 1989). While family support is important to college persistence (Hurtado et al, 1996), it is this very support that can be remarkably complicated for first-generation students and their families (Terenzini et al, 1994). Teresa described how, despite her mother's tears at the very thought of her not staying in school, she continually complained that when Teresa was studying she was "doing nothing" and needed to contribute more to food, rent, and other household expenses. Teresa recalled,

> I screamed at my mother, and I said, "If you want me to take care of the family, then I'm going to have to end up stop going to school, because that's a full-time job. And I can't have that right now. Either I go to school or I don't go to school. You decide for me. If I stop going to school, I'll take care of you. I will have a full-time job. Yes, I'll probably get a good full-time job, because of all the experience I have. But then, in the future, what am I going to have for myself? Now you want me to take care of you, but then who's going to take of you then.

Her parents' desires were too difficult to contend with. She summarized the mixed messages: "'Yeah, go to school. But no wait, I need you now. No, but go to school, but I

need you now!' Oh, come on. Where am I?" Teresa knew what lay beneath these demands was the extreme financial stress her family carried, but that knowledge did not help ease her way. The situation only got worse when her father lost his job and the cousin for whom her mother babysat moved away.

Other than students in Opportunity Programs who had additional supports[120] or those at elite private colleges with large endowments and few low-income students,[121] most Bridges graduates had little help managing their expenses other than working multiple jobs; 80% of college students work an average of 30 hours/week (King, 2006). While working eases the financial stress of college, it is a solution that comes with a host of complications. The more hours college students work in low-paying jobs on or off-campus, the less likely they are to persist (Paulsen & St John, 2002). Bridges graduates at colleges in the city found their work lives becoming more central than their college lives. Offers to increase work hours were rarely turned down and resulted in students spending less time at their schools, squeezing courses into night and weekend schedules, and eventually running the risk not persisting. One graduate explained:

> I used to work… and they were paying me twenty dollars an hour, so I was like I ain't quitting this job right here…it does pull you... There was one point where I was making thirty-eight thousand dollars a year... with two jobs... I had a nice little system ... [to it] ... [But] I noticed that my life was more towards work [than school].

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[120] One EOP student listed the additional financial supports she received: computer lab for EOP students only; free printing in comparison to the 50 page weekly limit for other students; fee waivers for the $200 deposit to Residential Life freshmen year; fee waivers for health care coverage, and book vouchers.

[121] One student at a "most competitive" private college, when she discovered she could not manage the additional costs, was told she could appeal to a fund set up for low-income students. She received money through this fund to cover all fees added to her tuition bill as well as her books throughout all of college. She explained, "You just write a letter, and they look at it and look at your financial records, and they give you an allotment, like you ask for like a thousand dollars, and they'll give you something subsidized or something close to it…so I wrote in for that, and that helped me take care of the books and then a couple of years after that, an alumni sponsored my books…Lab fees have been taken care of, because I asked... they had to review my financial aide at the college and because I was there on a full scholarship, I obviously could show that I couldn't afford it, and so they just took it away."

Many students at residential colleges, particularly at private schools, worked at least two jobs, taking them away from their academics and other campus activities. Maria, feeling a responsibility to help her unemployed mother and in need of spending money, worked three jobs on campus her first semester. Once she was making more money than she ever had, it was hard to stop. That cash allowed her to buy Chinese food several times a week for herself and her roommates, something which made her feel very good given that she arrived with no other contributions to the dorm room and few supplies for herself. [122] Niki also found herself working between two and three jobs in order to keep up with payments and expenses. Unfortunately, between her work and class schedule, she had little time to study, let alone go home to see her mother: "I had classes Monday through Friday…and they didn't finish till almost three… And then I had two jobs...I was loco seven days a week… I worked eleven hours [at the library]…[and] almost fifteen hours on the weekend for [the theatre]."

While working comes with an extra set of challenges, not working is not a solution either, as illustrated by Malik's experience. Malik found himself on a campus that did not have enough work study positions for the students who needed them because of the way federal work-study funding is allocated; [123] colleges, for decades, have received this funding based on a "base guarantee" of what they were awarded the previous year, rather than on the financial needs of their students (Education and Workforce Committee, College Access and Opportunity Act, 2004). Finding a job off campus was not easy either. There was only one supermarket in town and those jobs went to local residents;

[122] When I visited Maria on campus first semester she made sure to show me a wad of bills she kept in her dorm room.

[123] Given this shortage, it is particularly difficult for students entering or transferring into a college mid-year, as Malik did, to secure a work-study job.

and a car was needed to get to the next closest town. As Malik's savings diminished, he struggled, explaining, "Most of the time I was broke up there…after buying the books and buying like deodorant and all that stuff, it's basically you have no money."[124]

College Life: Finding Community

> *"I expected college to be the TV show, 'A Different World'? I didn't see Whitley and Duane walking around. But the way it was, it was like a different world."*
> *- Graduate*

At Bridges graduates had come to know and appreciate "school" not only for the academic learning it afforded but also for the support that came with it and the community it provided. In defining a "good education", alongside being engaged intellectually, Bridges students highlighted the importance of their relationships with teachers, other students, and being a part of something bigger than their classes – a community. Throughout high school they had been supported not only with their academics, but also with non-academic issues. When Malik learned he was going to be arrested, he turned to one of his teachers for help; when Niki's family was moving between shelters, her advisor helped her academically and emotionally; and when Charles struggled with his mother's diagnosis of breast cancer, he spent more and more time at school with his close circle of friends. Having had a supportive community to help them get through high school, finding such a community in college – whether they were aware of it or not – would become increasingly important to the persistence of Bridges

[124] Graduates attending one SUNY noted that several of their classmates turned to selling drugs. Students who had never contemplated doing it in the city realized it was both an easy way to make money and a relatively safe endeavor. One graduate explained, "In the city to make that ten dollars you will get killed doing it. Up here you make that ten dollars…you could do it and still be an A student…Even girls do it…You're not threatened…You could be in your house on your computer and studying and they'll come through and get it and you keep on doing your paper."

graduates. Furthermore, the images many graduates held in their heads of college life included this same type of community.

While perhaps particularly critical to Bridges graduates, being integrated into campus life is an important aspect of persistence for all college students (Tinto, 1987). Research shows that when students are involved in campus life, they are more likely to stay in college. Some studies highlight the importance of integration through relationships with professors and academic opportunities (Kraemer, 1997; Mayo et al, 1995; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Tinto, 1987), while others focus on the importance of social interactions among students and involvement in extra-curricular activities (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979 in Kraemer, 1997; Padilla et al, 1997; Richardson & Skinner, 1992). In part it is the validation that such integration allows for – coming from both peers and faculty – that is critical for students during their first year of college (Terenzini et al, 1994). In many respects when Bridges teachers spoke about college and when students imagined it they were assuming college would involve such interactions.

It is indisputable that integration into college life contributes to students' satisfaction with college and has been an important component of persistence for Bridges graduates; however, it is not always easy to achieve, and it has been particularly difficult for cross-sections of Bridges graduates. On the one hand, many of the colleges did not facilitate integration – whether academic or social – and, on the other, several of those that did appealed more to White middle and upper-class students, leaving Bridges graduates to either "commit cultural suicide" (Tierney, 1999) or remain on the outskirts of college life. As Barefoot (2000) argued, colleges were initially designed for economically-privileged White males and few have changed, leaving "many of today's

new students, [with a] a serious lack of institutional fit, not of their making." (p. 13) [125] For those colleges that were designed with low-income students of color in mind, for example community colleges that were meant to "serve youth from underprivileged and economically deprived families" (Knoell, 1966), college is nothing like TV and movies promise it to be. As one graduate commented, "I expected college to be the TV show, 'A Different World'? I didn't see Whitley and Duane walking around. But the way it was, it *was* like a different world." And as research indicates (Braxton et al, 1995), when expectations of college life are not met it makes it that much more difficult to integrate into campus life.

Looking at what happened when graduates transitioned onto their campuses reveals the layers of complexity surrounding integration. While some colleges had strong advising programs, others did not; while some created community through academic classes, others did not; while some had culturally-relevant extra-curricular activities, others did not; and while some graduates had the time in their schedules to get involved in college-life, others did not.

Integrating into Elite Private Colleges

Bridges staff was right in assuming that graduates' experiences at predominately White private colleges would be trying; like other low-income students of color on such campuses, they were subjected to discrimination (Hurtado, 2002), felt out of place (Harris & Nettles, 1996; Gonzales, 1998), and struggled to live on the margins of two cultures

[125] Interestingly, many of America's earliest colleges did serve large percentages of low-income students and thus were structured to support their needs. Many of New England's elite colleges founded between 1769 and 1822 had student populations where over half were poor; as such, tuition was low, there was ample tuition assistance, school vacations were designed so college students could work for significant lengths of time, and students were not required to live on campus. As these colleges became more established, however, their commitment to poor students waned. For example, while Harvard provided scholarships to 1/4 - 1/3 of its students in the 17th and 18th centuries, between 1810 and 1860 its tuition tripled and aid simultaneously diminished (Allmendinger, 1975; Levine & Ndiffer, 1996).

(London, 1992). One graduate at a private "most competitive" college commented that it was "completely new" to be around mostly students who were "beyond well off." It made her feel, especially in her first year, like she "stuck out like a sore thumb." Another highlighted how taken aback she was by the amount of drugs "rich kids" at her college did and wondered about the media attention given to drugs in "the ghetto." And a third complained that he felt like he was in a GAP commercial that he did not belong in.

Maria did what she could to fit into her predominately White and economically-privileged campus community, becoming an active member of the multi-cultural organization and making connections through her campus "big sister," but when a series of overt racist incidents occurred on campus it made her feel that much more out of place.[126] She explained:

> I didn't even really feel like I [fit] in, because my attitude and like the way I act, like from where I'm from… I didn't have nobody that I could really relate to. Even my friends, the friends that I made, they were rich…I would spend a lot of time ... [by myself] ... just thinking, like walking around on the campus. Like in the middle of the night or something…just walk around the campus and just think and be alone… I just want more students that think like me, act like me, have an attitude like me... From what I've heard, most of the students that are like me, they dropped out after first semester. They didn't get kicked out, they just left… most Puerto Rican students that go to [this school] didn't stay…In seein' that I was Puerto Rican, I think the teachers looked at that… [there were] times that professor just didn't understand…I just think like the professors didn't like me. I think that they believed I didn't belong… I was one of the only two Puerto Ricans [in the Freshman class]… it was definitely a fact that one of us was not going to be here… that's the theory at [this college].

Given these anticipated realities the question is how did Bridges graduates respond in such situations? The answer, of course, varies by student and by institution, but, generally, feeling like an outsider in college took a toll on all Bridges graduates, as it

[126] During Maria's first year of college, one campus sign that read "Help Prevent Unwanted Guests" was graffitied over to read "Help Prevent Unwanted Minorities" and another sign was found that read "Go home black monkeys."

does on many low-income students of color (Harris & Nettles, 1996; Steele, 1999; Hurtado, 2002; Hurtado et al, 1996). For some this led them to figure out how to fit in, and for others it led to withdrawal – psychological, emotional, and for some literal.[127] Of the Bridges students surveyed who began at private "most competitive" colleges, 62% either graduated or were still enrolled when surveyed and the remaining 38% had transferred or stopped-out. [See Appendix E for comparison of graduation, transfer, and stop-out rates across different types of institutions of higher education.]

Looking specifically at individual experiences, Charles, who was attending a private "competitive" college in New York City, found himself withdrawing from campus life at his college. In the face of other students' academic preparation and cultural norms, he took advantage of being a commuter student and spent little to no time on campus, "Normally as soon as classes end, I leave the school, so I don't stick around…I just flee school."[128] While he thought he would not be bothered by being one of a handful of low-income students of color, when he experienced it for the first time as a college student, he realized this was not the case. "I can't relate to my peers," he explained. "They're from everywhere around the country. Some of them are from other countries…Most of them have better financial backgrounds than I do…Although the hidden injury of my race, as Cornell West would say, that's huge. I can't relate because of where I come from." Being around his classmates only reinforced Charles' doubts that he did not belong. When Charles sat in the computer center and saw other students typing away, it only exacerbated his writer's block; when he heard students' comments in class,

[127] It is important to note here that those students at predominantly White colleges who persist through their first year tend to persist to graduation; most of those who leave, do so within or after their first year.
[128] When I first went to visit Charles and asked him to take me to places on campus where he spent time, he had nowhere to show me.

it only made him more silent; when he saw how different they dressed and acted from him it only made him that much more anxious to spend time with high school friends.

There were Bridges graduates, in similar situations to Charles, who worked past these feelings, using what they had come to believe was important to their education in high school to define their college life. One graduate, in the face of feeling alienated, revised a defunct Latino organization on his campus with the goal of heightening Latino cultural presence at the school; another founded an African-American co-ed fraternity; and a third founded a Latina sorority, sat on the college's Diversity Commission, and confronted administrators and professors with any racial or class injustice that she noticed on campus. These students, acting as "cultural workers" (Gonzales, 1998), refused to make a choice between college and their own cultural identities. In doing so, however, they had to work harder than most college students to make their experiences positive ones. As one of them commented, when you are a "token person of color" on campus you do one of two things: "isolate yourself from everything and just really withdraw" or take a leadership role and try to change things on campus.[129]

Integrating onto Commuter Campuses

While Bridges teachers expected such cross-cultural challenges for the students attending elite private colleges, they were less sure of what to anticipate for students

[129] Many researchers of persistence in higher education argue that institutions of higher education need to stop assuming racial and ethnic minorities will assimilate into the dominant culture (Steele, 1992; Rendon, 1992), because many refuse to do so (Gonzalez, 1998). The institutions need to make a commitment to diversity (Harris & Nettles, 1996), both by making their populations reflect true diversity—as this eases the tensions for individual populations (Hurtado, 2002) — and by changing the structures and cultures of their campuses to do the same (Vining-Brown, 1996; Rendon, 1992). They need to engage in curricular transformation so that course-work draws from multi-cultural perspectives and addresses issues of race, class, gender, culture and sexuality (Rendon & Hope, 1996; Gonzalez, 1998; Garcia & Smith, 1996); and they need to shift teaching methods from ones that are individualistic, competitive and evaluative to ones that are descriptive, collaborative, and cooperative (Garcia & Smith, 1996; Hurtado, 2002). These ideas will be revisited in Chapter 7.

attending other types of colleges. For those who attended commuter colleges, which over 50% of Bridges graduates at some point did, the question of integration presented other obstacles.

The image many Bridges graduates held in their heads as they headed to college was one defined by a campus community life, but for students attending college in the city, particularly CUNYs, this was harder to come by. A combination of working while in school, taking care of family, and attending colleges where the majority of students were doing the same, made it difficult to do anything other than "go to class and leave."[130] Bridges graduates attending CUNY schools complained of having no time to make use of facilities like swimming pools and gyms; they did not have spaces to "intermingle" with other students; and they almost never had the opportunity to meet with professors outside of class. One student lamented, "I'm not as collective as I used to be." Unfortunately, the way most of their classes were run made it difficult to establish community even within the class. Several were disappointed that they did not even know the names of their classmates. Unless part of an Opportunity Program, or attending college with a high school friend, Bridges graduates rarely felt supported on these campuses or formed new relationships.

Bridges graduates might have been disappointed by the lack of community at commuter colleges, but their response was to treat school as more of a "job" than an experience. Teresa's attitude was reflective of many of the graduates attending CUNY schools: she was not there to make friends. Even if she *wanted* to, she noted, it would be very difficult because students were so dispersed. She recalled meeting one student in

[130] Most graduates attending CUNY schools explained their experiences in college in similar terms if not with this exact phrase.

between classes with whom she exchanged numbers. Given the busy-ness of their lives, neither called one another, and, while Teresa assumed they would run into each other again, they never did. The practices of her college also made it difficult to integrate more formally through relationships with professors and academics. She emphasized that she had few, if any, connections to faculty. She was given an advisor but met with her only briefly and did not get much guidance from her. This became particularly problematic when Teresa was put on academic probation after having to drop two classes in her first semester for health-related reasons. Having never been advised to retake those classes to correct her GPA, she took a new set of classes and, though she did very well in each one, her averaged grades left her on probation. Teresa lamented, "An advisor is supposed to tell me [the way it works], and [my first advisor] didn't tell me, and I didn't know." Teresa did get help from her Bridges friend who attended the same college. They woke each other up in the mornings to get to school, waited on long registrations lines with one another, and generally served as supports to each other; but neither of them had the knowledge they needed to navigate the bureaucracy of college. Without these formal relationships on campus, it is difficult for low-income students to develop the tacit knowledge –"information that is not formally taught but is necessary for the successful management of education and careers (Arnold, 1995, p. 140) – they needed to make their way through the policies of higher education.

The effect of not being connected either to other college students or faculty members was difficult for many graduates, particularly given their understanding of a "good education." Teresa explained,

> I'm not a college girl, I'm a college student. I'm just a college student…A college girl – she spends lots of time there. That's what she likes to do – college is her

> world, her life revolves around it. A college student – you go in you do your work, you're out. You're just a student – you're just a student to your teachers, you're just a student to you…That's what you are… I wanted to be the whole nine yards. I wanted to do it all. But it didn't turn out that way. Maybe it was the school that I'm going to but it didn't go that way.

Another graduate explained the effects of this transition: at Bridges she was "jolly" and excited to get up in the morning to go to school, but in college, where she just went for her often un-engaging classes, she had become a "totally different person." She explained, "As soon as I hit the corner, my face would go down…I just didn't talk to nobody." While she wished college were more like Bridges, where things were "more family-like," she had come to accept that in college "everybody's on their own."

Integrating onto Diverse Campuses and through Opportunity Programs

There were Bridges graduates whose college experiences conformed more to the traditional images of college life and who integrated into their campuses. These were the students who attended culturally diverse residential colleges and/or were part of one of New York State's Opportunity Programs. Not only did these graduates display positive help-seeking orientations (Stanton-Salazar, 2001) and take the initiative to integrate into a campus community, their institutions (or programs within them) supported and encouraged them in doing this. Wesley, for example, whose college was 30% African-American and Latino students, got involved in several clubs – African People's Organization, Student Activities Board, and a community service organization – had many friends, and was even nominated freshmen of the year. He described his college as a "community," explaining that people "check in" on each other, "get along", and "don't fight." Niki had a similar experience. While she thought that she was not going to have a social life in college, she quickly realized "you need friends" and joined the Caribbean

Culture Club and the African American Organization.[131] Being on a campus that had as many students of color as hers did – 20% of the students were African-American or Latino – helped. She explained, "When you get here, it's like, oh a lot of these people came from the same place that I came from. They made it just as far as I did….[That's] very good company."

Being integrated into college life did present its own set of challenges for both Niki and Wesley. Niki explained that "trying to juggle your friends and your work at the same time…trying to be more active on campus…balancing everything" was a challenge. Having attended Bridges, where there were few extra-curricular activities and the only free-time was lunch, it was particularly difficult to manage this new independence. However, Niki and Wesley both used their help-seeking and networking skills to manage it. Wesley found himself learning from his friends and made sure all of his professors knew who he was – in the event that he needed support from them – taking the time after each class to speak with them.[132] Niki turned for help at every corner: she sought out study partners; she went to her professors for extensions; when faced with the prospect of being kicked out of the dorms because an expelled student had been found in her room, she went to an administrator she had come to know who intervened on her behalf. "If I hadn't went and talked to her, tried to get to know her, tried to make her know me, she wouldn't have been able to help me, and I think I would have got kicked out [of the dorms]," Niki observed. In addition, she continually looked to her Bridges friend for

[131] Niki and Ava joined these two clubs together, choosing them because Niki is African-American and Ava Caribbean-American.

[132] At the end of a business class, during one visit to see Wesley, he went to talk to the professor and to introduce me to him. While the class had over fifty students in it, the professor knew Wesley by name and told me Wesley was "one of his favorite students;" Wesley had done no more than speak to him after his classes.

support – they proofread papers for one another, woke each other up in the morning, and generally picked one another up when they were about to fall.[133] Other Bridges graduates who had attended college with high school classmates had similar experiences. Five graduates who attended a "competitive" SUNY together stressed the power of this connection, "The fact that all five of us are here, it does help…just the fact that we come from the same high school and the same educational background, that we are here and we're going to make it."[134]

Graduates who attended college through New York's Opportunity Programs had similar experiences around campus community and support – though for them finding institutional support was less challenging. Initiated as an outgrowth of the Civil Rights Movement these programs were designed to provide financial, emotional and academic support to low-income students who were academically under-prepared for college. They were the saving grace for many of Bridges graduates and an important example of institutional agency within higher education. The Opportunity Programs provided a space that worked to reverse low persistence rates for low-income students of color and was designed to address their varying needs. [135] 85% of the 26 Bridges graduates who were enrolled in college through Opportunity Programs had graduated or were still in school

[133] During one of my visits to Niki at school, she had a paper due in her early morning philosophy class. While she had completed the paper, her printer had broken and so she could not print it in her room. The paper was due in class that morning. Ava took Niki's disc, went to the library, printed the paper, and met her at the end of class so she could hand it in on time. She was the life rope Niki needed whenever she was in a bind – which, given the strains of college life for a low income student, was often.

[134] Four of the five students graduated within four years, and the fifth graduated after five years. As Terenzini et al (1994) found, for first generation college students, going to school with a high school friend is an asset as they serve as a bridge for one another between environments.

[135] While individual Opportunity Programs vary across campuses, all have summer "bridge" programs to ease the transition from high school to college, free tutoring and counseling services, and additional funding to assist students in buying books and other living expenses.

when surveyed.[136] While Bridges students were resistant to these programs while in high school, fearing they implied students were not "good enough" for the school,[137] those enrolled through them identified such programs as their greatest sources of support. As one said, "I probably wouldn't be here [if it weren't] for…EOP…Gotten in…and stayed…you have like a lot of counselors pushing you. They're like your parents. They know everything about you, personally. They're there for you."

Bridges graduates highlighted specifically the ways in which these programs provided support and community to them, emphasizing the importance of having access not only to other students like themselves but also to counselors who had also often been Opportunity Program students. One graduate attending a SUNY recalled that in her first year of college she went to the EOP office every day, "whether it was to socialize or ask my counselor what am I doing wrong – what am I doing right?" It was in that office that she could always find someone she knew on her campus of over 11,000 undergraduates, talk to a counselor if she was having a problem, or sign up for academic tutoring if she needed it. While low-income students of color often feel out-of-place on their campuses, Opportunity Programs give them a place to feel comfortable – to belong – and to confront their reticent feelings about being in college. One explained, "I went…crying to [my counselor], 'I don't want to be here no more.' I cried, I cried, I cried… He's like, 'What are you talking about? You need to be here. You need to be here.'"

[136] This statistic is commensurate with Opportunity Program's general persistence and graduation rates, which are higher than nationwide averages for low-income students of color. Specific data on the achievements and effects of Opportunity Programs are presented in Chapter 7.

[137] This perception about Opportunity Programs comes in part from the ways in which they are portrayed by SUNY representatives and the general language used to describe the programs. This is something that needs to be mediated by teachers and graduates to shift student perceptions of such programs.

Opportunity Program students were expected to meet on a regular basis with their counselors to discuss course progress (they were given mid-term reports from professors), receive guidance around issues like course selection, and trouble shoot problems. Some students said their counselors arranged for "second chances" to avoid a low GPA that would lead to a loss in aid. It was also through these offices that students established the connections they ultimately needed when they were feeling challenged and the faculty relationships they so craved. Charles, who came to spend more and more time in the HEOP office on his campus, explained, "HEOP people, no one escapes them. Even when you don't think they're watching they probably are…It's a good thing."

Walking around one competitive SUNY, first with a non-EOP student and then with an EOP student, illustrated the difference in the experiences. The non-EOP student showed me the library but said she most often studied in her room; she pointed out the advising office where she waited on a long line twice a year just to have a five-minute conversation with her advisor; and she said that emailing her professor with questions was her main source of help. The EOP student, on the other hand, took me to meet her financial aid counselor, the director of the EOP program, and her advisor.[138] She showed me where she has free, unlimited access to printing and a fax machine and the tutorial center filled with EOP students where she spent most of her time studying.[139] In many respects Bridges graduates enrolled through Opportunity Programs were able to continue

[138] When I walked into the EOP office with this student she said hi to her counselor; with his back turned to her, he greeted her by name recognizing her by voice only.

[139] Opportunity Programs have been criticized for their "isomorphic" nature (Garland, 1993; Treisman, 1992); they are too separated from the culture of campuses and too disconnected from the core academic life of college. Students are grouped together not based on intellectual interests, but rather because of demographic descriptors. Isolating these programs from the general life of the campus has two effects: it can make it difficult for Opportunity Program students to integrate into a broader campus life – as Charles, commented, he saw himself as an "HEOP students" not a "[Name of college] student"; and a reliance on these programs to meet the needs of a sub-section of students can stymie change in the practice and culture of individual colleges towards meeting the needs of all of their students.

their small school experience, while those who were not often found themselves lost in the equivalent of a comprehensive high school.[140]

Not all Bridges graduates attending colleges or programs with diverse student populations had positive experiences. While at times this was due to issues with students themselves, at others it was because the institution the student attended failed to meet their expectations of college. Malik, for example, attended a relatively diverse SUNY– where 16% of the students were African-American or Latino[141] – but social and academic integration did not come easily. There was little community on campus, few clubs to participate in, and he was disappointed by the attitudes of many of the students. While he had been most looking forward to experiencing "campus life," he was frustrated by the lack of academic focus, fighting, drinking, and drugs. "You come to college, you're paying for it…It's a privilege. It's an honor…not many people [get to] come here," he asserted. "A lot of people I know are taking it as a joke…You could have fun as far as like parties…but why try to fight people? Take that to the city." In reflecting on what about the college contributed to this culture, he pointed to segregated housing and dorm conditions – there was one dorm, isolated in the back of the campus that housed most of the African American and Latino students; it was covered in graffiti, had "weed on the

[140] While more Bridges graduates should be enrolled in college through Opportunity Programs, one of the main reasons too few are – along with other low-income students of color –is because of limited budgets that are increasingly becoming even more limited. With budget cuts affecting all college tuition and financial aid - particularly at public colleges - Opportunity Programs have also taken a hit. When I visited students at one State school, the financial aid counselor reserved for the EOP program had already been moved out of it and into the college's financial services office. A graduate herself of the EOP program at the college, she was particularly outraged by the effects budget cuts were having, and would continue to have. She explained that there are usually 600-650 EOP students at her college and they were told the population must be cut to 500 for the upcoming year - which translates into admitting 40-70 students rather than 120. Furthermore, services would be cut – the summer program had already been reduced from six to four and a half weeks.

[141] The residential population of Malik's college had a higher concentration of African-American and Latino students. 35% of the student population commutes and as local residents those students are mostly White.

floor," and almost always had police presence. It was as though the "ghetto" were being recreated on his campus – "I was like this can't be college…you [go to college to] try to get away from that atmosphere." Malik also did not find it easy to establish relationships with adults on campus. His professors were not around after class and he had an advisor who he saw only once. All of this made it difficult for Malik to persist, "There was a couple of times I wanted to go home so bad …the town has nothing to offer…there's not that many clubs on campus…after you get out of class, you go to your room, watch TV…it was like same old everyday."

Conclusions

While more Bridges graduates persist through college than low-income students of color do nationwide, it is not without a fair share of struggles. They are told all throughout high school that college should be the next step after high school, and almost all of them take that step. Just what they are stepping into, however, is often unclear to them. While crossing the divide from high school to college is done relatively blindly for many high school graduates, for low-income students of color who have had little exposure to the culture of college and who are less sure of what they will find on the other end – other than loan statements to pay back – more foresight is critical. When Bridges graduates step into their new worlds of college, regardless of how well they are able to make the transition, they are taken aback. For some the chasm is so great that they have to take a step-back before returning a second year, while others continue to plunge forward.

Chapter 6

UNEARTHING THE COMPLEXITIES OF A COLLEGE-FOR-ALL APPROACH: YEARS TWO AND THREE – *WHY COLLEGE*?

This chapter looks closely at the journeys of Niki, Wesley, Teresa, Maria, Charles and Malik through their second and third years after high school to further understand both why Bridges graduates persist through college at higher rates than national averages and why those numbers are lower than Bridges staff hope for. In doing so it will further speak to the possibilities of institutional agency, the limit-situations (Martin-Baro, 1994) within which schools function, and ultimately the often fallen promise of higher education when complicated by the realities of race and class in America.

As Bridges graduates moved through life after Bridges and contended with the series of academic and non-academic obstacles to persistence, they confronted a question they had never fully answered: *Why college?* In high school they had decided to go to college because they believed they needed a degree for social mobility, it was an important way to distinguish themselves from their families and communities, and their teachers had successfully transferred the middle-class value placed on college-going to them. However, as the graduates began to confront the realities of "college-life" amidst the factors that define the lives of low-income people of color in the United States – absent of the on-going supports of middle-class life – they needed new reasons to keep them in college. While each one of them maintained a desire to go, and continued to view college as an important pre-requisite to social mobility, they wanted clearer and more specific answers to the following questions: What would they do once they finished college – and what did they *want* to do? How would college prepare them for this?

Would there be jobs available, and what did they need to do to ensure that they were positioned to get one that they enjoyed and that paid well? What institution would best prepare them for their future *and* provide a satisfactory college-going experience along the way?

As Bridges graduates confronted these questions, what became clear was that, more than anything, they were grasping for answers based upon relatively limited understandings of the changing landscapes of both higher education and professional careers (Aronowitz, 2000), as well as the links between the two. They did not have the tacit knowledge they needed to navigate their post-secondary choices. While Bridges staff had focused on preparing their students for college with regards to academics, they had done less to help them to answer these less-anticipated questions. With the need to prepare all of their students academically for college consuming their time and a generally limited understanding of the complexity of the college-going process for low-income students of color, the staff's main goal was to motivate their students towards college. Beyond that they did little to help them to take ownership over or develop an understanding of the intricacies of the application and college-going processes.[142] In the end, while Bridges graduates maintained high aspirations and continually illustrated an intense desire to learn, they often found themselves floundering to figure out where they fit within a system of higher education they still knew little about – a system which assumed social and cultural capital they often did not have and where the odds were increasingly hard to beat. Adding to the multiple obstacles to persistence they faced were

[142] In many respects first-generation college goers need to do much more with regards to understanding the landscape of college than their middle class peers. Unlike students from college-educated families who have a clearer sense of where they want to look within the larger system of higher education, having not previously ruled any colleges out, first-generation students have to consider all of the different types of institutions of higher education.

the implications of not necessarily having made informed choices about college when they were in high school and subsequently not having access to the knowledge they needed to make informed decisions as they moved through it.

The complexity of the college-going process, and Bridges graduates' general lack of preparation for that complexity, manifested itself in a variety of ways. As Bridges graduates confronted a college experience that did not look like what they had imagined it would, some struggled to stay in, others transferred, and others stopped-out. Although overall persistence rates for Bridges graduates were higher than average – with 72% graduated or enrolled when surveyed, 67% had stopped-out at one point or another, and 32% had transferred at least once.[143] The lessons that can be learned from graduates' journeys continue to provide insight into the ways in which high schools can – and cannot – mediate social reproduction within America and shed further light on the dilemmas and paradoxes faced by schools like Bridges. Brief snapshots of where Niki, Wesley, Teresa, Malik, Maria and Charles were in the fall of 2003 illustrate the multiple factors affecting their journeys – some of which they could have been better prepared for by Bridges and others of which lay outside the locus of high school reform. Despite the odds, these graduates maintained a desire to continue their education, but they often struggled to figure out just how to do so. Following the snapshots, the chapter will explore two central struggles graduates faced: figuring out both why they should go to college and how to move across the landscape of higher education.

Looking Closely: Fall 2003

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[143] Of those who had stopped-out and were not enrolled when surveyed, 54% were hoping to return to college and therefore faced the question of if and how to transfer to a different college.

Niki emerged from her first year of college with a high GPA (high enough to place out of the PASS program) and was confident that graduation was three years away. Having not worked during her summer break –her mother needed her to take care of her younger siblings – and having come to feel like an outsider in her community, she was relieved when fall semester arrived. Her nickname in her neighborhood was "college girl;" females thought she believed she was "too good," and males were intimidated to date her. They accused her of "sounding white," something Niki spent a lot of time trying to understand after spending a year at college where people told her she sounded "ghetto."[144] As the first day of classes approached, however, she was unsure of whether she would be able to re-enroll at her college; tuition had increased $2,000 and her aid had not. Using what she had learned about navigating college her first year and the connections she had made through her work-study placement, Niki successfully advocated for more grant-based aid to cover the tuition increase. Despite the additional aid, however, she had to work three jobs first semester, while carrying a full-course load. Complicating the beginning of classes at her college was a strike by professors who were demanding more pay, especially given the tuition-increase. By the third week of school, several classes had not met, leaving students with the threat of being under-enrolled and the greater consequence of a loss in aid for those who would no longer qualify as full-time students. Most of Niki's classes were meeting, and so she plunged head first into her academic work and her social life.

Wesley, after having spent the summer bored at home, also felt very excited to return to school where he had come to feel he had developed another "family". While he had worked a summer job, his earnings went straight to helping his family to pay the bills, so he could not afford to go out often at home. Back at college, he was living again with one of his freshmen roommates – the African American from New Jersey (the White roommate had actually moved out by second semester) – and he and his mother were trying to secure additional scholarship money to help him through the rest of his years there. While he was looking forward to his classes, he was not able to get his first choices as he was unable to pre-register – "That's why it's important to pay your tuition bill on time," he noted. The threat of not returning due to finances made Wesley realize just how much he wanted to be in school and just how happy he was at his particular college. He

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[144] Niki, like others, found herself experiencing the code-switching many educated minorities confront. She explained: "I'm always having to change myself to adjust to the setting and where I'm at. If I'm in college, I have to change the way I'm acting there, and if I'm home I have to change the way I act here… a lot of students who come from like the same background that I do… they don't see a problem with it. But like a lot of my friends… one…he's a white boy, but he sells drugs on campus, right? And he's like, 'Why do you speak like that? I ain't.' There's no such word as ain't.' And I'm like, 'Well, so what? I'm not in class now. This is the cafeteria. Why do I have to sound proper in the cafeteria?' And it's like, 'Well, it's proper English. You have to sound educated.' So it's like when I'm around, it's like, they turn up their nose at me because I'm speaking in such a manner around them, and then I go home, and it's like, 'Why are you using big words like that? Well, we all can't be in college like you.' You know, it's like wow. It's such harsh words, coming from people who used to be my friends…Sometimes I just have to let them know…stop trying to tell me how I should be. Like if I act that way, just be happy that another Black girl went to college. If I sound educated, be happy…Don't try to put me down all the time…a lot of the time, I just have to put them in their place."

was even more appreciative upon learning that a couple of his close friends could not return because of costs. Wesley began his second year with two jobs, a full course load, and a commitment to several on-campus organizations.

Teresa was issued a letter of dismissal at the end of her first year. While she received a 3.2 GPA for her second semester, she had failed two courses in the first semester because she missed too many classes for health reasons, which severely lowered her overall average and resulted in her placement on academic probation. As she did not see taking time off as an option, she immediately wrote an appeal and brought it to her probation counselor. She explained, "I wrote the appeal on my own. I went to the office early in the morning. I took time out of work…I waited for [my counselor] to have time for me… She didn't remember [me] until she saw my case…she noticed that I'm a B-slash-A student. So she was like 'You should be able to get the appeal.'" In the end, Teresa was granted it, and the only repercussion was that she had to do late registration. She was relieved but not surprised because she was confident that she would persist at all costs. She explained, "It's in me…I can't stop." She was still most proud that she had distinguished herself from others in the community, "I look at myself when I'm walking and I'm like, I go to college. Wow!... I look at people and I'm like, they're not in college, but I am." Unfortunately, her close friend from Bridges who had attended college with her the year before would no longer be there; her friend could not register because she owed the school money. She had withdrawn from several classes the previous year for varying reasons,[145] but she had been awarded stipends based on a full course load. As a result she owed the college $130 and had to complete payments before registering for more classes.[146] Teresa moved forward alone, and even began to speak with a few more of the students in her classes. Still, she spent little time on campus as she was working from 3:00-7:00 daily and problems in her family life were slowly but surely causing her more and more stress.

Malik was conflicted about returning to his school come the fall. He wanted to go back, particularly because he had grown bored at home and felt "extra weird" because people treated him like he no longer belonged. At the same time he was not convinced that his college was the right place for him. After being so excited to begin college, he had learned quickly that it was not the "big happy roller coaster" he had imagined it would be. He was hoping things would be different and was looking forward to rooming with his Bridges friend, but he was still reticent about his return. He was on academic probation because he failed a business class, and, while he passed his English course "with flying colors," he was not registered for any writing classes. He was also stressed about both money and the disconcerting campus life at his college. Regardless, Malik

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[145] She dropped one course because it required students to spend additional money for supplies and another because she was placed in an advanced class when she belonged in a beginner class.

[146] Information on this student came from an interview directly with her – not through Teresa. This was the student I had initially planned to follow, but dropped when Teresa's plans switched to attend the same college as her. I had conducted pre-college interviews with her and her mother, and then on one visit to Teresa's college this student – though she was stopped-out at the time – had accompanied Teresa to campus because she liked being at a college. When Teresa's professor would not allow me to sit in on her class, I took the opportunity to interview this graduate.

went with a positive attitude and acknowledged it was going to be a "do or die" semester – "I get to really see if I really, really, really want to stay there or I really want to leave." When he arrived on campus, he immediately confronted his first challenge: tuition had increased, but his financial aid awards had not. After getting his schedule, buying his books, setting up his room, and attending classes for three days, the financial aid counselor told him that the only way they could help him to pay the additional tuition was to offer him another loan – going from $2,000 in loans to $4,000. When he thought about his courses, two of which were being taught by the professor whose class he and 85% of the other students had failed the previous semester, and about his dorm, which "was drug-infested, had cameras…cops is there like every day," he decided to turn around and go back home. He told no one he was leaving – other than his roommate – and was under the impression that no one, at least no staff member, would notice his absence. "I don't think they really cared," he admitted. Once home, a combination of his mother's concern that he would not return to school and his own desire to be in school made him want to "do something quick." He enrolled in one of many of New York City's for-profit schools that offer fast degrees and "guarantees" of job placements, but after a week reviewing basic addition and nouns, realized it was a mistake and withdrew. He began to search for both a job and a new college.

Charles also received a letter of dismissal at the end of his first year because of his low GPA. "I collapsed and failed miserably…I broke under pressure," he explained. His writer's block did not go away – it only got worse with the heightened need to overcome it. He did not believe appealing his dismissal was the right thing to do – "It was time to end the charade," he explained, "because basically…I've been doing mostly nothing all semester." He had not yet made sense of why he was unable to complete his work– he was interested in the subject matter, understood most of it, and even had things to say. At the same time, he faced the same continual struggle: he was not confident that he belonged in college – or at least at the college he attended. Furthermore, going for help just felt like an admission of an inability to do the work, so he rarely went for it. Now Charles realized he was faced with an even bigger hurdle; he wanted to continue school but, he explained, "I have to jump through hoops for other universities to prove that I'm eligible enough to go to school because I failed… That's just quite demoralizing." Furthermore, now that he was not in school, he would be moving to Florida with his mother. He began to confront the looming question of what he would do. "Look at my hands, I've not worked a day in my life…other than writing," he fretted. He was not able to imagine himself as a "paper-pusher," but then again he knew that without a college degree his options were limited. In the fall of 2003, alongside job-searching, he was doing a lot of soul-searching. His first email, titled "A Semi-Dilemma", read: "They say (whoever they are…) that having a little too much time on your hands is a bad thing…After reading 'Letters of a Young Poet' by Rilke, I'm having problems with my supposed craft. I've asked myself MUST I write? Would I die if I didn't write? Would the world even care? Would I? The job search looms. And at this rate it seems I'm only destined for telemarketing hell or serving the fast food that gives us our antibiotics. My mother pretty much hates me for not lending any support, and my days have turned into unproductive slush. Perhaps I was meant to middle manage, or sell shoes for the rest of my bloody life. I'm doubtful of everything."

Maria was confronted with a situation similar to Charles' – though she was seemingly less prepared for it than he was. In May of her first year she said classes were going well and that she looked forward to my visiting again in the fall of 2003 but by early June she received word of her dismissal. She could write an appeal – the Dean even offered to help – but, while she contemplated it at first, in the end she decided not to. She believed she had "failed" both because she was not "comfortable" at her college as a Puerto Rican and because she could not adjust to the independence she was afforded. The transition to college for Maria was like crossing an ocean. Not only were the students very different from her, but she had both control of her time and access to things she had never had before – like cable TV, disposable income, and dating. Unlike in high school where her days were tightly structured for her, in college she went where she "pleased," dressed how she wanted, and spent time doing whatever she desired doing. Within this new life, she reasoned, her academics were an afterthought. She decided it would be best if she stayed in New York City, worked, and went to college in spring 2004. She would start at a community college and then transfer to NYU or Columbia. She was happy not to be saddled with any loans and believed that she could get a job that would help her save to go back to school. By the fall of 2003 she was living between her grandmother's and boyfriend's apartments – she had had a falling out with her mother who disapproved of the way she had started to live her life and was working at a drug store for $5.15 an hour. She told people she did not return to college for "financial reasons." While she missed having "school work," she appreciated that her life had become "more simple" – she had begun cooking again and believed "that's a necessity, because as I get older…I have to know how to cook myself, and if I get married, for my husband and my children." Thus college would sit on the back burner as she dedicated herself to her relationship with her boyfriend and to saving money so that they could get married and move away from New York. She was staying connected to school work by helping her boyfriend to get his high school diploma through a series of correspondence classes and re-reading the only books she had in her closet – the Goosebumps series.

A Continued Desire to be in College – and the Struggle to Maintain It

"The fact that I'm itching to return to school after having it cause so much misery is testimony to my desire to learn." – Charles

"They say you can't even get a job right out of college. Then why am I here taking out all this money?" – Niki

Those graduates who had remained in college past their first year did not want to leave – Wesley commented, "I really don't want to leave college. I wish I could stay … forever." Those who had stopped-out were anxious to return – Malik said, "If I don't go back by January I will be crushed." While the graduates who had stopped-out were

unclear about many things in their lives, they were clear about one thing: they missed academic work and intellectual engagement. His first semester out Malik commented, "Believe it or not, I miss the school work," and Maria observed, "I just love going to school… it's something I like to do…I do miss it." Charles, feeling the same loss, spent his nights on "nocturnal missions" trying to approximate what he might be doing if he were still in college. He read everything from Rilke to the history of Che Guevara and wrote poetry on topics ranging from the war in Iraq to the nature of love.[147] Beyond the academic work, stop-outs also missed their identity as a college student and the pride that came along with it. As Malik expressed, "When I was [going to college] everyone looked at me as some big thing…Now, I'm just back to normal Malik."

Alongside this desire to be in school, however, were the questions brought on by the unforeseen challenges of higher education and the on-going difficulties within their communities and families. Within their second and third years out of high school, these questions became more prominent in the thoughts of Bridges graduates. For those in college, the difficulties that had presented themselves in their first years were only exacerbated. Many were learning less than they had hoped and were often bored by classes; finding community on their campuses was often harder than anticipated; and finances were growing more stressful. For those not in college the awareness of those same barriers was fresh in their minds. This, coupled with an increased understanding of the still too-limited economic opportunities available to those even with a degree, led graduates to question the benefits of higher education and to strategize around how to maximize their chances of reaping whatever benefits there were.

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[147] As testimony to his "nocturnal missions," most of the poems and emails I received from Charles were sent between 12:00 and 5:00 am.

While the most-often articulated reason for attending college among Bridges graduates was to secure a good job, by their second year out of high school they had begun to actively question how guaranteed that was. As Wesley said, "I had a lot of friends who were just graduating, and they're having a hard time getting jobs. The market for us graduating college – it's hard for us to get jobs." Wesley's concerns were grounded in a sobering reality. While a college degree continues to be regarded as the best way to a lucrative and stable career – and in many respects it is[148] – with increased access to higher education the job market cannot maintain job guarantees to all graduates (Anyon, 2005; Lafer, 2002); in 2000 almost one in ten of the working poor had graduated college and the Department of Labor predicts that most job openings within the next ten years will not require a college degree (Anyon, 2005).[149] Exacerbating these realities for Bridges graduates is that the pay-offs of a college diploma continue to favor White males at the expense of increased social mobility for others. Looking across groups with Bachelors degrees, the median income for White men is 33% higher than it is for Black women and 39% higher than for Hispanic women (in Fine & Burns, 2003). As Fine and Burns (2003) argue, "Race, ethnicity, and gender mediates the degree to which increased education enhances earnings" (p. 843).

The more graduates became aware of these trends, the more worried they were. As Niki said, "They say you can't even get a job right out of college. Then why am I here

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[148] Aronowitz (2000) states it well in explaining why college attendance is compulsory within this economy, "First, many young adults are pushed into college by anxious parents with firsthand knowledge of the sea change that has afflicted the job market. They know that there are few good factory jobs and even fewer well-paying service jobs, and that most of the others offered to high school graduates are low paid and dead-end. Second, and most important, whatever the major and although it does not ensure a decent living, a college degree provides the minimum qualification to enter the market for a large variety of jobs, even if many are temporary and contingent." (p. 9)

[149] The Department of Labor predicts only 12.6% of new jobs, within the next ten years, will require a BA. (Anyon, 2005, p. 20).

taking out all of this money?" What they were becoming frighteningly aware of was that a Bachelors degree – and certainly an Associates – was not enough; they needed to think about graduate school as well.[150]

Niki's question became a constant in the minds of Bridges graduates, and as tuitions increased – as they have been doing nationwide across public and private universities (Gladieux, 2004) – the question only became more pressing. As the opening snapshots reveal, several graduates were faced with higher tuition bills come their second and subsequently third years of school. When Malik was faced with the prospect of taking out more loans to continue attending a school where he felt he was learning little and which provided him with nominal community, he packed up his bags and went home. Niki, on the other hand, who did feel a part of a community at her school, successfully advocated for more grant-based aid to help meet the $2,000 increase after her first year. However, when tuition was raised another $2,000 at the end of her second year and a financial aid counselor told her that her only option was to take out more loans on top of the $10,000 a year she was already taking, she too concluded it was not worth it; she decided to transfer.

Wesley faced a similar situation to Niki, but his fate was reversed mid-way through his second year when he was granted a scholarship through the September 11th Fund. His mother, who worked across the street from the World Trade Center, survived the 2001 terrorist attack but had a series of physical ailments in the ensuing months. The

[150] Of the Bridges graduates surveyed who had completed a four-year degree, 48% were applying to or attending graduate school. The need to matriculate straight into graduate school raises anxieties about choosing a career major; this will be explored later in the chapter. It is also worth noting that 29% of Bridges graduates surveyed – both those who had completed their Bachelors and a couple who had stopped-out – were working or had worked at Bridges in positions including substitute teacher, administrative aid, facilitator of after-school programs, and assistant to the college counselor, among others.

scholarship covered Wesley's tuition as well as room and board. Once he received this funding, Wesley's college experience changed. He stopped going to the financial aid office on a regular basis, stopped looking into colleges to transfer to, and while he had had to register late three out of four of his semesters because of late payments, he would not have to worry about getting the classes he needed or wanted again. Moreover, he no longer had to stress about completing FAFSA forms or other related paperwork. He explained, "It's changed things *a lot*…I'm blessed, man…it's a big burden that I don't have to deal with anymore – financial aid … I'm just relieved that I don't have tuition on my mind like that anymore."

Teresa, while she did not have to worry about tuition as it was covered at her two-year school, by her third year at community college had begun to feel trapped by being there and questioned the benefits of an Associates degree. She began to doubt whether it was worth it to jump over the multiple hurdles that stood before completion and several more that stood in the way of matriculation to a four-year college. Given what she saw around her she was concerned, "I [see] myself at my college just going to school and having nothing to show for it. Can I get a job in this? That's what I need." After listing the hurdles – 21 liberal arts requirements irrelevant to her career focus, a mandatory graduation exam, a math remedial exam,[151] loss of credits in her transfer, another exam to transfer credits within her major – she lamented, "I saw my dream kind of differed every time I went to [my college]. It seemed like, every semester I had a little bit more to do…I didn't really see myself leaving anytime soon." Furthermore, while she liked some of her classes, there were many she did not like, and she did not feel a part of a

[151] Teresa explained that she had not been able to take a math remedial class for two semesters because the sections she wanted to take were over-enrolled; there were other sections but they conflicted with her work schedule or met at 8:00 a.m. and she did not believe she would be able to get to school in time.

community on her campus. As she concluded, "College for me, it gives me something to do – it gives me something to talk about…but it doesn't give me adrenaline. It doesn't give me the things that I need to keep going." While she still *wanted* to be in college, these realities, alongside growing tensions at home – her parents were having marital problems and her father had lost his job – created uncertainties about how much longer she could persist. [152]

Collectively, what all of these graduates needed – whether they were in college or not – were more clear answers to why they were in college, and so many set out to figure the answers out as best as they could, all too often on their own.

Why College?
Looking for Answers while the Meter is Ticking

> *"You could explore but you have to be very cautious because while you're exploring you're also wasting money." - Teresa*

Given the odds Bridges graduates were facing, and the anticipated loan statements that would follow immediately after their graduations from college, in order to stay the course what Bridges graduates needed – other than academic and social incentives on their campuses – was a clear understanding of what their degree would offer them. For most the answer still lay in career possibilities; but they wanted to be more clear about what that career might be, how likely it was they would get a job within that field, how much they could expect to make once there, and specifically how their studies in college would help them to get there? By their second year out of high school each graduate was

[152] Teresa was devastated to learn her father had been having an affair with a woman in the Dominican Republic after being married to her mother for 35 years. When he was let go from his job, and told he had to pass a culinary exam to return, the situation was complicated by the fact that he continually turned to Teresa to help him manage the details and prepare for the exam. This took up not only time but a tremendous amount of emotional energy for Teresa.

finding it increasingly important to figure out a career-direction and connect it to their college-going experience, yet many were lost as to how to decide. As they fumbled to find direction, what became strikingly clear was just how little they understood about their options and just how much the lack of accurate information shaped their questioning and too often their decisions. This issue, one which unfortunately sits at the intersection of social mobility and the effects of non-dominant sources of social and cultural capital, shaped both the struggles and – often misguided – decisions of graduates.

Embracing, and Questioning, Liberal Arts

Many Bridges teachers had encouraged their students to embrace the virtues of a liberal arts education, as their college-educated families had taught them; however, unlike their middle and upper class peers, Bridges graduates lacked confidence that a liberal-arts college degree would provide them with multiple options for career paths, allow them to secure a good job after college, or easily matriculate on to graduate school. While Bridges graduates who were unsure of what they wanted to study were advised to explore their options through liberal arts, exactly what liberal arts could offer them was unclear, and most who embraced it did so with reservations.

Niki's experience typified this struggle. Upon realizing that getting a job after college would be harder than she had originally thought, Niki began to question her decision to study psychology. Believing that this major could only lead to a job in counseling, she was unsure whether she wanted to do that. Furthermore, she had heard that the only way to get a well-paid job in the field was to continue on for a Masters or PhD. She did not know how much more time she wanted to study psychology and pay for more schooling, but at the same time she was not willing to take a low-paid social service

job when she had multiple loans to pay back. Before beginning college her father fretted, "I don't see how far she can go in psychology… Sigmund Freud [is] the only psychologist I know who [went] down in history…But I don't want her to have to feel pressure to make some groundbreaking discovery." That was the exact pressure Niki had begun to feel, and it was complicated by her awareness that she was not at a top-tier university whose name carried prestige.

More and more, Niki began to think that she should be studying business or accounting, like many of her college friends who were convinced there would be both "lots of jobs" and "lots of money." Not particularly interested in business and skeptical that there would be enough jobs to go around, she was relieved to learn of the different directions she could take with a degree in psychology: "I thought that if I got a degree in psychology I would have to stick to psychology forever, and it was going to be bound to me. I couldn't get any job except for a psychologist or a counselor…I couldn't do nothing else with it."[153] Once she understood that, as she said, "psychology's a liberal arts degree," and that she could go on to study law, teaching or generally "branch off," she was not only relieved but also convinced that it was the right direction. At the same time, Niki did continue to worry about what came next. When looking to transfer colleges, the first thing she asked about was job placement rates; she decided to minor in marketing rather than take art courses which she might enjoy but which had "no use" to her; she enrolled in a home health care aid program over the summer that provided her with work and paid for classes towards nursing; and in her junior year she decided that she would move directly from undergraduate into graduate school.

[153] Niki called me for advice when she fell into a crisis about whether it made sense to study psychology. Her new understanding about a liberal arts major came mostly from me. In the afterward I will further explore the implications for my role as a researcher.

Finding a Vocation

While several Bridges graduates wanted to embrace liberal arts, along with the notion of college as a time to explore ideas and majors, they had a similar, though often more pronounced, hesitancy. Teresa commented, "You could explore but you have to be very cautious because while you're exploring you're also wasting money." As such, many Bridges graduates began college with a career focus based on little knowledge other than their impression that they had chosen a well paid professional field. Graduates surveyed had chosen a range of majors, but most focused on fields of study that they perceived to have – and which often did have– clear career goals. Of the graduates surveyed, 19% reported majors in non-career focused areas (e.g. Hispanic Studies, Sociology) and 81% in career-focused ones (e.g. Business, Computers). [See Appendix F for breakdown of majors Bridges graduates pursued.]

Aronowitz (2000) argued of college-bound high school graduates,

> [T]hey have little idea what they want to 'study.' In most cases their choices of major and minor fields are informed (no, dictated) by a rudimentary understanding of the nature of the job market rather than by intellectual curiosity, let alone intellectual passion. (p. 10)

While Bridges graduates' experiences illustrate this to be true in many cases, they also reveal that using intellectual curiosity to guide one's course of study is a luxury most low-income students do not believe they can afford.[154] Some, finding their chosen major was not a good match, set out to find another, sometimes thinking most about the potential jobs on the other end and other times thinking about their interests. Finding the answers, however, was further complicated by their limited knowledge of and exposure to professional careers.

[154] Niki's mother commented in an interview that she was pleased Niki had chosen psychology and, with it, a professional focus, comparing this to Ava who planned to study Western Philosophy.

Teresa, for example, entered college with the plan to study accounting but had learned that given her weaknesses in math accounting might not be the best career path. In fact, not having passed the remedial math exam barred her from moving beyond an Introduction to Accounting class. She explained, "I lost the passion…for what I really want to do in life." Using what she knew about other careers, she considered her options. She liked computers but then thought of the only person she knew who had a computer-related job, the computer technician at Bridges. She asked, "Am I willing to be that? I can handle it, but would I really be happy every day waking up, like okay, I've got to go deal with computers instead of …helping people." She considered education, especially because she excelled at her job as a counselor in an after-school program, but did not believe her college even had an education major. Moreover, she worried about the extended time college would take if she had to start "over" with a new major.

Those graduates who had stopped-out of college – 67% of those surveyed[155] – were even more plagued by the question of what they wanted to do with their lives. Many were unwilling to return to college until they figured it out. Again, the problem was that they were working from a grossly limited understanding of the landscapes of careers, higher education, and the connections between the two. As Malik, who began college with the intention of studying business with a focus on sports marketing, commented,

> Is there something else out there that I'm probably good at and I want to do? That's the thing that's killing me right now – I can't go back to college until I figure it out and it's just like nothing's popping into my head. Then when ideas do pop in my head, its something that I really don't want to do…I feel I'm a good writer…[but] what degree would that be? I don't know.

[155] Of the 67% of graduates who stopped-out, 43% returned and 54% of the remaining ones planned to return.

Maria also began college with a focus – she intended to major in human development to have a career in education. Once she stopped-out of her "most competitive" college, however, she began to question this goal. At first she thought she wanted to "work with babies," but exactly what this meant was unclear. She explained, "I'm thinking of working with…I don't know what they're called – the nurses that work in the infirmary – the nursery – where the children are born." Yet, almost in the same breath she suggested she might want to be "a regular nursery teacher." Having a hard time distinguishing between the two, she believed she wanted to "focus on babies" and "change diapers," rather than "deal with children's attitudes," but she also thought about teaching children under five. Within two months, however, Maria began to think she should go to college to become a secretary – "I love doing paper work. I love working on the computer. I love writing. I love filing…I *love* organizing." Still, she decided to wait to re-apply to college until she had saved money and moved to Pennsylvania with her boyfriend.[156] There she would "take up home schooling for college" – correspondence courses. Again a few months later, having broken up with her boyfriend, Maria returned to the idea of being a neo-natal nurse and decided she should go back to college to pursue pre-med; in discussing what she would then major in, however, she was surprised to learn that pre-med would entail majoring in a science field and so was at a loss: "I don't like science, really…I'd have to be a biology major…then I'd have to study plans, a lot of plants and gardens." Perhaps she would double-major, she concluded, so that she would not have to choose between nursing and secretarial work. Ultimately, Maria decided,

[156] In this conversation Maria told me that she and her boyfriend planned to save one-million dollars; they already had $2,000 in the bank and her boyfriend made $15.00 at a jewelry shipping company.

> I do need to finish college so that way I can get a better job, but for right now I am just trying to figure out what I want to be. I am still not sure about what I want my profession to be for the rest of my life.

This confusion over professional trajectories is not unusual for college students; the difference is that for Bridges graduates – as low-income students of color, with limited resources to navigate the confusion – it often stopped them dead in their tracks, and it was incredibly difficult for them to figure out which track to get back on.

A Continued Desire to be in College: The Challenges of Staying and of Getting Back In

As graduates grappled with their direction in college, they also tried to figure out how that connected to where they attended college – and, more broadly, where they belonged within the landscape of higher education. Their initial decisions about where to apply and ultimately go to college were often based on a limited amount of information and were most influenced by the advice of their college counselor, where their friends applied/planned to go, and financial aid packages. Now that they had experienced the realities of college life, however, many were getting closer to figuring out what they had wished they had figured out before going: What did they want (and need) in a college? They had come into high school with an image of "college" shaped by the media, knowing little about the differences among the variety of types of colleges within the United States, and in many cases they left high school having come to understand only marginally more. As they set out to find their place in higher education what became clear was that they needed to discover college for themselves. What specifically about it excited them? What were the differences among colleges? What type of college or program most interested them? As most of them were not from college-going families who themselves understood the landscape of higher education, they now had to figure out

these next steps even more independently than they had to when in high school.[157] Many did just this: 32% of Bridges graduates transferred at least once, and, while 67% stopped-out at one point in their journey, 43% of them returned to college and 54% of the remaining stop-outs planned to return.[158]

Graduates who had stopped-out of college or found that their colleges did not meet their needs remained confident that they wanted to be in school, but transferring and/or getting back in was a more difficult journey than they had anticipated. Furthermore, they were taken aback by what little control they had – particularly the stop-outs – over their next steps.

Logistical Hurdles

There were a series of unanticipated logistical hurdles – mostly financial but also related to the bureaucratic processes and policies of higher education – that often prevented Bridges graduates from transferring or beginning school as quickly as they had hoped. While these hurdles were often unavoidable, with little understanding of the policies of higher education and little tacit knowledge to navigate them, they were difficult to manage. Malik, who had stopped-out after tuition was raised, turned to a for-profit trade school because he wanted to get back into school as quickly as possible. After a week of classes, however, he quickly realized this was a mistake and set out to transfer to a two or four-year

[157] While the effects of class on navigating the initial college-application process have been documented (Bloom, 2006; McDonough, 1997), it is important to think of the implications for the transfer process as well, especially given that nearly 60% of college students transfer at some point during their college journey (Pappano, 2006).

[158] The six graduates who I followed throughout this study had access to me as a resource – and they used me in this manner. While this fact altered the trajectories of their college journeys, the survey was with a distinct set of 90 graduates. This suggests that the majority of Bridges graduates, even without the direct presence of someone like myself, took the steps to transfer; at the same time, how informed their decisions were cannot be assessed.

school. [159] He commented, "If I don't go back to college in January, then I'll be kind of crushed." Unfortunately, come January his goal was unrealized. Malik had researched and applied to CUNYs, but when he had not heard back by December he called CUNY Admissions only to learn that his former college had not sent his transcript because he still owed $400. He would have to earn enough to pay off his previous balance, as well as an additional $50, in order to reactivate his CUNY application for the fall semester.[160]

Charles faced a similarly frustrating delay to beginning college again. After spending the fall missing school, he decided he should seek out a college within commuting distance from his apartment in Florida. Confined by limited public transportation, he did not have many options, but he did find a community college an hour and a half commute from his home. He was willing to make the journey if it meant reclaiming at least part of his academic identity and intellectual development. Looking through the course catalogue, he was dismayed that most of the courses were vocationally focused, but was able to find an anthropology and writing course and was sure he could find a third. Over the course of eight days, however, his plans were summarily crushed. First he discovered he had not completed his FAFSA in time to receive aid, and so classes would cost $122.98 each. Thinking perhaps he could afford one course, he further pursued the possibility;[161] but he then found out that, because he had been living in Florida for only six months he did not count as a Florida resident. He would have to pay out-of-state tuition – upwards of $1,500. “It seems that I will not be going to school this semester,” he concluded.

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[159] This will be further explored later in the chapter in a section on the lure of for-profit colleges.
[160] Malik saved money to pay off this balance, but he also used his stipend money that he received for participating in this research to pay off the balance. Stipend money was consistently used to cover unanticipated costs of college-going such as this.
[161] Charles planned to use his stipend money for this.

Finding the "Right" College

As graduates looked for new colleges in which to transfer they also began to face the question, as noted above, of what they actually wanted in a college. While this was an empowering process in certain respects, it was also a frustrating one as graduates were not always able to *choose* the college they had determined was "right" for them. More often than not, their decisions were confined by financial issues, their still-too narrow vision of college, and for some by their first year academic records.

Niki, for example, who had generally been happy at her college, was forced out when tuition increased for a second year in a row. As it was, she was already taking out $10,000 in loans and working two or three jobs a semester. She lamented, "I like this school. I'm comfortable with it. I know how to get home. I'm comfortable with the teachers. I know what is acceptable and what's not acceptable,"[162] but she simply could not afford it. Her priority, other than cost, was finding another college where she would be comfortable. What she concluded, without looking into too many options, was that the SUNY down the road from her college was her best option, even though it was not her ideal school. In part because of her preconceived notions of the difference between public and private colleges, she saw the school as a "step down" from her college and as "ghetto"; her vision of "college" included having many White students on campus, and this one did not.[163] Overall, as she explained, the school did not "fit with my image of college".[164] At the same time, she liked most that the new school was so close to her first

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[162] Niki added that she wanted to stay at her college "even if I am not learning that much."

[163] This college is listed as a "competitive" one; 33% of students are White, 26% African-American, 14% Hispanic; 28% of Freshmen do not continue beyond their first year and 35% remain to graduate.

[164] Niki's greatest concern in attending this college was its reputation as a "ghetto school." Having gone to a college that was private, somewhat selective, and mixed racially, she explained what she saw to be the problem with this particular SUNY: "The school used to be like anybody and everybody can get in there, so that people would smoke weed. There were a lot of Black people that just felt like the hood…I was like,

college: “It's only one bus stop. I know where the mall is. I know where the [bus] is. I know where everything is. I know how to get home.” Furthermore, a lot of other students at her college were thinking of transferring as well – also for financial reasons – and quite a few were looking there. Finally, when she went to visit the campus and to speak with a representative from the college, she learned annual tuition, plus room and board, would be $16,000. Her response, “Are you sure? For one semester or the whole year?” She continued, “I was just shocked.” Given that half of her tuition at her private college was covered by federal and state aid, most of the new tuition, if not all, would be covered. These financial differences were ones she had never fully explored when searching for and applying to college while in high school, but which she now intimately understood.

Malik's choice of where to transfer was similarly affected by external forces to which low-income students are highly vulnerable and against which they have little protection. Frustrated that he went to college but had not had what he saw as a “real college experience” – the kind you see in the movies – he set out to find it. When he first began to contemplate where to transfer he was skeptical of SUNYs because his experiences at his first college made him think they were not "real universities" – “most SUNYs I hear its pretty much the same thing…there's like nothing to do really.” He then described one school he visited that he really liked because it had a "big campus," "a big grass area," and "things to do;" he was surprised to learn that that school was a SUNY.

I’m kind of scared. Where are the White people? ... It’s too ghetto for me.” As Niki explained her concerns, she was aware of the complications that lay beneath them – not only was she African-American, she had initially wanted to attend a historically black college. But she could not escape her reaction to the mostly African-American student population that seemed to come from the “hood” – “It reminded me of my old block; it was just like a flashback…I did not come to school to feel like I'm back in the ghetto. I did not.” The problem was the school, as she said, “didn't fit with [my image of] college.” Niki brought up these concerns with the advisor with whom she spoke. The advisor conceded that the school “was ghetto” but assured her that it was improving because it had raised the SAT score needed for admittance and thus were letting in “more quality students.”

Malik found himself wishing, overall, that he had spent more time in high school learning about different colleges, "I didn't even check out the colleges until after I got accepted," he lamented. With his new opportunity to explore colleges more carefully, however, Malik began to envision what the "right" college would look like: a "nice environment" where "everyone's going there for a purpose;" classes are small and have "hands-on" "teamwork" and a lot of discussions; coursework is career-related and grounded in the realities of the work world; and students help one another out.

Malik was surprised to find something close to his vision on his first visit to a potential new college – a small, diverse, private college within commuting distance from New York City. After spending the day meeting with professors, touring the campus, talking with students, and sitting in on a highly engaging class, he was enthralled and excited to have found what he was looking for.[165] For the first time Malik found himself defining and asking questions that were important to him: What majors were offered? What was the race and ethnic breakdown of students? What were relationships between students and professors like? Based on what he heard and saw, he concluded,

> I really could see myself in that school, because it's just an extension of Bridges, as far as the comfort level. Everyone seemed comfortable with each other. And it was just like a little community, a little family…it seemed like everyone wants their classmates to pass… in class discussion they may disagree, but everyone still at the end, like I saw the two girls [who argued in class about the discussion topic] gave each other a hug at the end of class. [166]

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[165] Malik commented that he appreciated the diversity of the students at this college, felt comfortable participating in the class he observed, and felt "special" and "important" when he was able to talk with professors; when he walked into a professor's office who offered to talk to him about the school, Malik commented that he had never been in a professor's office before.

[166] It is important to note here that when Malik told me he was interested in exploring other colleges, I arranged the trip to this college and contacted a professor I knew at the college. This professor scheduled a meeting for Malik to meet with one professor and arranged to take us on a tour of the campus himself. In addition, he invited Malik to lunch in the faculty cafeteria – where Malik sat with three professors and discussed everything from college basketball to majors. Lastly, he arranged for Malik to sit in on a class. This type of visit – and the transformative power it had over Malik – could have only happened through someone like me with such contacts, or rather the social capital, to arrange it as such. Having a personal

At the same time, based on his newly developed understanding of the stress of college costs, Malik decided he could not afford to attend the college and so he did not apply. Given that this was a private school outside of NY State, he calculated just how much of a financial strain it would be. While he would maintain his Pell grant money as a low-income student, he would lose his TAP because the college was in New Jersey and the only scholarships the college offered transfer students required a higher GPA than Malik had.[167] One professor advised him that he could "go into debt like the rest of us," but this advice did not resonate with Malik; from what he could tell, he was not like the rest of *them*. As Malik explained,

> [The money] kind of scares me a little…what if I take out these loans and I don't stay the whole four years…not [because of] academics or not wanting to be there, but financially…the financial aid is the biggest scare to me.

In the end Malik decided that going to a school in New York City and commuting for classes would be best. He explained:

> I said, 'Self, I don't think I'm really, really, really ready to go away. One, I wasn't financially ready, and emotionally I wasn't really ready…I was thinking about when I was in [my first college] how miserable I was – just money, missing home…all that stuff counts.

It was the first time Malik found himself making a choice within his college process. "I feel like in the city there are more opportunities," he explained. "I can get a job…I'm close to my family so I can work and go to school and just try to be a little bit happier. You can't be

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tour allowed Malik to observe a host of things about the college that were important to him: he was impressed with how many times the professor touring us around the college stopped to talk to students and knew them by name; he felt good about how comfortable he was participating in the class he attended; he appreciated having the opportunity to talk to students directly about their experiences – "I haven't really talked to students like that"; and after eating lunch with three professors he said, "I felt really important." Students coming from middle-class, college-educated families, are more likely to have parents or family friends with the social capital to set up such a visit using their connections to colleges they, or extended family and friends, attended.

[167] One professor suggested Malik seek scholarship money from a local church or community organization to which he was connected. The only one Malik would think of was a Boys and Girls program he attended at a local church, but when he had been arrested in high school, it was because a boy in that same program had accused him of assault. With this history, Malik did not think he could return to this organization for help, and, like many other low-income students, he was not connected to many others.

miserable…then it just [all] goes down." With a renewed sense of urgency, he set out to find a city school and was anxious to reengage in academic life,

> I can't wait till August just to see what school I'm going to – to talk and have discussions and just learn. I don't want to be no street bum doing nothing. So I'm learning and then get high respects for learning [and] being in college.

Finally, Charles, who also began to take ownership over his education, had a similar experience of finding the "right" college, only to also discover it really was not an option. After deciding that the only way to return to college was to go back to New York, Charles applied to SUNY and CUNYs and began a process of petitioning re-admittance to his first college – partly so that he would not have to "begin again" and partly so that he could "right his wrongs." With regards to the latter, he wrote an eight-page analysis to his college explaining what he thought led to his poor academic performance his first year. In it he highlighted the following: the less than ideal circumstances he faced when entering college – "Having come off a stressful senior year that included my mother's cancer diagnosis…I wasn't in the best place to be taking on school so quickly;" an academic inferiority complex that plagued him – "My insecurity with absorbing class material and understanding was difficult, especially since I kept second guessing myself, even though my analysis about say – Susan Sontag's ideas about disease and the military…were sound;" and his unwillingness to get help – "I tried to get to the root of the problem on my own, too afraid to approach professors who seemed distant and couldn't possibly relate to my plight due to their intimidating titles and status." He then proceeded to contact anyone and everyone he could to make his way back.[168]

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[168] Throughout this process I saw Charles take the initiative in ways I had not seen before. Realizing what a difficult process transferring was – both logistically and emotionally – particularly if doing it alone, he wrote me, "This is nearly as frustrating as the first time around. Can you call me so I can iron out EVERYTHING in my mind? And write it down, of course. I want the gratification that I made this work,

Recognizing that he might not be re-admitted to his first college, and curious as to whether there were a "better" place for him, Charles also visited a SUNY.[169] As he walked around the campus and talked with students, he realized that in many respects this would be a very good college for him – and attending would solve his problem of where he would live given that his mother no longer lived in New York City. He was excited by the school's writing program, appreciated having the chance to talk with professors, and learned that the school had a strong EOP community.[170] Unfortunately, Charles' affect changed drastically in the middle of a discussion with the director of the EOP program. The conversation began well, the director suggesting he switch his application to apply directly to the writing program, but then the conversation, took a turn.

> *Field Note. May, 2004*
> *The director asked, "Did you have a 2.5 at your [former college]?"[171] ... Charles simply said, "It was a bad year." "Did you have a 2.0?" [the director] asked, his voice changing tones. "It was a bad year," Charles repeated. "You weren't dismissed from [your college], were you?" Silence fell so quickly, the tension rose just as fast. "Yes, I was," Charles responded. Silence hangs in the room as hearts drop. [The director] took less than a moment and put it bluntly – he could not transfer in without at least a 2.0 in college; it is not possible. He then went on but his words seemed to rush together: Where do you live? How could Charles answer that? "I'm staying with my aunt right now in the Bronx." Pointing out the proximity [the director] explained that Charles could take some classes at [this college] as a non-matriculating student in the fall and then come to [the college] in the spring. But this would be money out of his pocket – with no chance of aid. Or he could go*

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unlike the last time I applied to schools." Once he had completed his applications he flew back to New York – using his stipend money – to meet with administrators at his former college. When one began to explain all the steps he needed to take for re-application, Charles assured her, "I did all that. I'm prepared."

[169] I accompanied Charles on this college visit and had arranged the tour through another Bridges graduate who had attended the college. While I had not set up meetings with any professors or administrators, our tour guide took us to meet a variety of students and staff on campus.

[170] Once a student has been admitted to college through New York State's Opportunity Programs she or he, upon transferring to any other college that has an Opportunity Program, continues to be a part of the program; furthermore, if they chose to attend a graduate school with an Opportunity Program they also remain a part of the program.

[171] At this point I asked Charles if he wanted me and our tour guide – a student at the college – to leave the room. He said he did not mind if we stayed.

> *to [a community college[172]] … He made clear that it was pointless of Charles to change his application to apply to the creative writing program. In fact, if he had paid he should get his money back. I felt my own heart sink down – and could only imagine Charles'. "What about his high school record?" [our tour guide] asked. "That doesn't matter – we don't look at that once you have been in college." Charles' existence now defined, in the eyes of college admissions people, by his transcript from [college] - the rest effectively deleted. His prior identity obliterated and redefined in a sweep by one "bad year." Charles' worst nightmare: once you "mess up" – it is so hard to get back.*[173]

Charles expressed a similar resolve to Malik's. "I knew this was coming," he said. "I'm just down a leg – that's all. Everyone has a head start…I can claw my way back up."

Beginning Again

Once graduates had sifted through all they needed to in order to transfer to a new college – or begin again at one they had left – they faced yet another set of hurdles. While many of them lacked sufficient understanding of the landscape of higher education when looking into beginning again, they also lacked "transfer student capital" (Laanan, 2001) – an extension of tacit knowledge that encompasses what students need to know to negotiate the transfer process, including logistics like credit-transfers and grade requirements for admissions as well as the emotional aspects of fitting into a new environment once again. Having gotten as far as they had however, and with the resolve to keep on going, they moved through those obstacles as best as they could in hopes of getting their degree.

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[172] The director of the EOP program actually recommended that he go to a four-year CUNY first, believing that the CUNY system had open-enrollment at all colleges, two or four-year, demonstrating a clear disconnect across institutions within the larger system of higher education.

[173] Maria, with an interest in beginning college again and even studying abroad, called NYU's office of admissions and learned that, because she had been dismissed from her first college, she needed to attend community college first to raise her grades.

Charles was granted a second chance and was re-admitted to his first college on academic probation – he had to maintain a 2.0 for two semesters before going off probation, and, if he did not achieve a 2.0 his first semester back, he would lose his aid.[174] Thrilled about the news, Charles believed he would rise to the challenge and that this re-admittance proved he belonged at the school. Unfortunately beginning again did not come quite so easily. While Charles had lacked residency to attend community college in Florida, he was no longer a New York resident either. He had now been gone from New York City for a year and had no mailing address. This lack of residency made him ineligible for TAP and HEOP, which meant, as he said, "I cannot afford to go to school." Determined to make it back, Charles had his mother re-file her tax forms to remove him as her dependent – costing her money she did not have – and completed another set of forms to become a dependent of his grandmother who did live in New York City. It was "a lot of annoying red tape" and "a lot of waiting," but in the end he secured residency and was able to begin school. By early September he wrote in an email,

> I'm having fun. Being back isn't as scary or nerve-wrecking as I thought it would be…my classes choices aren't too bad and my schedule has large blocks of time in it, which gives me a lot of time to breathe and relax as I actually DO my assignments…Granted, it may only be the second day, but it'll be December in no time so my feelings are positive ones, which is a refreshing change of pace.

Malik faced a different set of challenges in beginning again. Having decided to stay in New York City, he was admitted to a community college. He went to visit to see how it fit with his image of "college" and found that it did not; in fact, he was particularly put

[174] Charles pursued re-admittance on his own, but his ability to get a second chance was helped by several connections he had fostered and used within and outside of his small college: his connection to me for on-going support and feedback with the process; his connection to the HEOP program counselors who he communicated with about his appeal; and his connection to his first-year advisor. Furthermore, my connection to one faculty-member at the college helped his appeal along as well. As illustrated in Chapter Five, many of Bridges graduates had few – if any – connections on their campuses to help them through an appeals process like this, particularly those attending large colleges.

off by the "rough" neighborhood location. Not having understood the CUNY system, he was relieved to learn that he could attend a different community college, and so he visited a different one and enrolled. [175] His next obstacle, however, were the CUNY assessment tests that determine whether a student has to take remedial courses. Concerned about the math exam, he had a neighbor tutor him for it – providing her with free donuts from his work as pay – but in the end he did not pass the math or the reading exam.[176] The result was that he would have to use his financial aid money to pay for non-credit bearing courses.[177] The greater consequence, he learned once he began, was that remedial instructors were not particularly helpful in preparing students for the exams. Malik's math instructor spoke limited English and students often corrected his problem-solving, and his reading instructor read the newspaper and spoke on his cell phone during class.[178] Beyond the remedial requirements, Malik did not find what he was looking for in a college. He did not know his professors, nor did they know even his name, and no one was at his school "to make friends." Regardless, he was resolved to "get this degree" so he could "get a good job."

Niki faced a different set of challenges at her new residential college; while relieved to be taking out only $1,000 a semester in loans and paying only $88 out of pocket, she was disappointed to learn that she would lose eight credits, thereby obliterating her chances of graduating within four years. It also took her time to emotionally transition to

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[175] Malik learned this when he called to tell me about his acceptance and feelings about the college.
[176] Having received a B in his English course at his first college Malik was surprised by this. By the end of his first semester at CUNY, however, he passed the English exam, missing only two questions.
[177] While I first included a question on the survey about remedial courses to determine what percentage of Bridges graduates had to take them, I decided this question would not lead to a just or representative answer; of the colleges Bridges graduates attended it was only CUNY schools that had clear remedial courses, and in particular ones that were not credit-bearing.
[178] Other Bridges graduates who took remedial courses complained of similar problems with regards to problematic teaching within the remedial courses.

her new college and to create a social life for herself. She was "a bit lonely" at her new school and greatly missed her old one, spending most of her free time visiting friends at her first college or having them come to visit her. At the same time, as she got settled she came to appreciate more and more what it meant to go to college without such a high level of financial stress. "When you get so concentrated on money," she explained, "your grades tend to slip…I got the most Cs last year when I was working three jobs because I didn't have time to study…Now I have time – I read, I do my homework, and sometimes I sleep." While it took some time, she had also come to challenge her own ideas that her new college was "ghetto" and to readjust her image of what a college should look like.

The Lure of For-Profit Colleges: "Easy" Answers to a Complex Process

As some graduates grew frustrated within their colleges and others came face to face with the obstacles to transferring and matriculating to another, several began to turn their attention to the many for-profit colleges within New York City that provide seemingly easy answers to many of these complex problems. While only one of the Bridges graduates surveyed began at a for-profit institution,[179] 17% went on to attend one at some point during their college journey. Like many other low-income students of color, they were taken in by the aggressive recruitment strategies of for-profit colleges, the clarity such schools offer about career direction, the simplicity of the admittance process, and an approach to schooling that – at least on the surface – feels more like Bridges than the larger colleges they had attended. At the same time, these colleges come with a host of problems that are often unclear to and furthermore disserve the very students they aim to attract.

[179] The student who began at a for-profit college was recruited for the school's women's basketball team; the college she attended did offer both Associates and Bachelors degrees as well as certificates.

For-profit schools have been proliferating nationwide representing the fastest growing segment of higher education. Between 1999 and 2004 enrollment grew over 46% at New York's 441 for-profit colleges, in comparison to a growth rate of 15% at non-profit schools (Arenson, 2005a).[180] With the goal of making money,[181] for-profit schools have figured out how to lure students – mostly low-income ones who receive federal and state aid – and then provide them with what they need to finish their programs, often lowering standards along the way (Arenson, 2005b, 2006a). While tuitions are high – between $8,620 and $23,544 – students in New York can use their Pell and TAP money to attend; 17% of New York's TAP grants and 12% of New York's share of Federal Pell grants go to for-profit colleges, despite the fact that they educate only 6% of New York State's college students (Arenson, 2005a). Furthermore, unlike non-profit colleges, these schools admit students and offer loans irrespective of tuition balances at previous colleges. With "guarantees" of jobs on the other end, students are often more willing take out these loans. One graduate who transferred into a for-profit college explained that she was first taken aback by the $11,000 annual tuition, especially in light of the fact that she would only receive $3,725 in grant-based aid to cover it, but then decided, "I want to go to this program. It's straightforward. They teach me… [and I could] go straight into the field."[182]

While for-profit schools intend to attract low-income students of color in just these ways, as Karen Arenson of the New York Times reported, "[T]here is much debate among educators about whether commercial schools…are preying on the most vulnerable

[180] Nationally for-profit institutions grew 147% between 1995 and 2002 (Arenson, 2005a).
[181] Corinthian Colleges Inc, one of the largest umbrella organizations of for-profit colleges, for example, continues to increase its profits with shares going up 23% within a year. (Reuters, 2004).
[182] This student took out two loans, one subsidized and one unsubsidized.

students." (2005b). Given their approach to schooling, while those for-profit colleges that target high school dropouts have suffered low-completion rates (Arenson, 2005b), overall persistence and completion rates tend to be higher for them – 65% of students complete their programs in comparison to 51% at private colleges and 27% at public ones (Arenson, 2005a). Bridges graduates have had similarly high completion rates at for-profit schools – 47% of those who attended received a certificate or degree.[183] At the same time, few offer degrees or transferable credits to non-profit colleges; of the 441 schools in New York State only 41 grant associates or bachelors degrees (Arenson, 2005a). The injustices of these schools, and the ways in which they further disserve populations already disserved, are very real; in fact with recent reports of the problems inherent in for-profit institutions, the New York State Education Department has recommended that limits be placed on their growth and that stricter monitoring of them begin (Arenson, 2006b).

Some graduates were dubious of the promises made by for-profit schools – Malik remarked, "I don't get it, how can you get your GED and your college diploma at the same time?...This is a con." Nevertheless, with little understanding of the underlying problems, many Bridges graduates found for-profits to be the easiest places to turn once they had stopped-out of college.[184] While exploring non-profit colleges and universities entailed using the internet, going to the library, or connecting with the college counselor at Bridges, graduates had an abundance of information about and access to for-profit schools. At every turn in their daily lives they were met with ads– on subways, in

[183] 8% of all Bridges graduates hold certificates or degrees from these schools.
[184] Even Malik, despite his first negative experience with a for-profit college after leaving his SUNY and his skeptical attitude, continually returned to the idea of attending one, exploring them through websites, open houses, and visits.

employment source books, and on daytime TV. Malik explained, "One thing I know is staying home, during the afternoon on TV, like from about nine to eleven, like the talk shows, they all have a lot of commercials about Gibbs, Apex all those trade schools." Additionally, it was these schools that their family members knew the most about. Malik explained how his uncle repeatedly referred him to for-profit colleges, despite the fact that Malik had enrolled and withdrawn from one within a week. His uncle suggested he look into the "bigger ones" reasoning that it would alleviate his boredom and help him to get a better paying job. Malik also had several friends who had attended for-profit schools – one went for air conditioning repair and was making $15 an hour, and another, who went for computer training, was making $25 an hour. Furthermore, once Malik showed the slightest bit of interest in one of these schools by contacting them for more information, he regularly received phone calls from their admissions office encouraging him to apply. This stood in stark contrast to his feelings at his first college; for the first time he felt wanted within the system of higher education. Teresa, whose sister had attended a for-profit college, was similarly skeptical, believing they were "slick" and "cons," but she had a cousin and another friend who attended them and continually extolled their virtues, particularly when Teresa was most frustrated with the realities of her community college.

Beyond the recruitment strategies, and a part of them, is the way in which for-profit schools make the college-going process "simple" and appealing with their promise of fast degrees, job security, and personalization. For students wading through liberal arts requirements, unsure of where their college degree would land them, and confused about career direction, for-profits were a welcome alternative. Given their life circumstances,

several Bridges graduates found such schools made more sense than "traditional colleges" did. One graduate, who had attended both a residential SUNY and a private commuter college, saw a commercial about one for-profit and decided it was the best move for her. She explained, "[My college] would have [taken] so long. [The for-profit school] had accelerated classes…really different classes…I figured because I have two kids now, I wanted to finish faster…It was perfect for me." Teresa, anxious to begin earning more money to support her family, concurred after she was assured by one for-profit school that 88% of graduates (from the school's first and only class) secured jobs: "I wasn't guaranteed a spot anywhere when I got out of [name of first college]…I had to still go to school. But if I get out of [name of for-profit school], I still could get a career and then go back to school."

These schools also offered something even more profound to Bridges graduates – a personalized education that more closely resembled what they had experienced in high school where they rarely felt out of place. Those graduates who had attended larger city colleges were attracted to the small classes and one-on-one attention at for-profit colleges. One graduate, who had attended a CUNY, explained that at his for-profit college teachers were more "approachable" and they "cared a little more about what you did." Another pointed out that the director of his for-profit school "always made sure if I needed help to come and see him…that had something to do with me finishing."

Teresa was immediately taken in by this personalization. One day, after sending an on-line request to a school about their medical administration program, she received a call from the school to schedule a visit. When she arrived she was greeted by a friendly administrator who explained that all of her classes would be taken with the same 10-12

students, the instructors worked in "the field," and she would have a two-month internship that would most likely lead to a job. She was asked to take an exam on the spot, and, within moments after completing it, she was told she had been accepted. Teresa recalled what the administrator told her: "The director, she loves you. She took [one] glance at you and saw your personality. She saw how you came presented and she really did like you. She just accepted you on the spot because of the way you are."[185] It was this type of acceptance and affirmation that Teresa, and other Bridges graduates, had missed most since graduating. While the costs would be greater – the same administrator strategically worked out a plan with Teresa so that she would pay $148 a month[186] and take out loans upwards of $2,000[187] – and none of her credits from her first college would transfer, she had decided it was well worth it to be able to complete a program within 17 months with a certificate that allowed her to work as a medical secretary, billing clerk, coder, among other things.[188]

Beyond the friendlier and simpler admissions process, several Bridges graduates who attended for-profit colleges appreciated what they found inside of their classrooms. One, who had first attended a four-year CUNY and then transferred to a for-profit trade school, explained that at her first college she was "just a number;" the professors "brushed you off;" the students did not work together; and she had no major. She found it was different at her new school. She likened it more to Bridges where the teachers "treat

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[185] One other Bridges graduate I interviewed who had transferred from a four-year CUNY to a for-profit college explained a very similar experience with regards to taking and passing a test on the spot.
[186] The administrator first asked Teresa if she could pay $300 month; when Teresa said she could not handle more than $175/month, the administrator, ostensibly to make her feel more comfortable, suggested she pay $148/month. Teresa reasoned that she "wasted more than $148 on books" at her first college, and here books would be included.
[187] Teresa was unsure of the interest rate on these loans or when she would need to begin to pay them back.
[188] Teresa was also informed she could take an additional five months, after the certificate, to complete an Associates Degree.

you as a person." She explained: "If you have a problem they stop the whole class, and we're going to go over the problem until all of us gets it." Furthermore, they regularly broke down information to help students understand it and tested frequently so they would not have to master too much at once. While many question the standards of these schools, this graduate was clear, in the moment at least, about the rewards, "I love to go… I feel comfortable…I feel like myself [again]."

Teresa echoed many of these same things about her classes and the general environment of her school. She also likened her school to Bridges explaining that help was always readily available: "There's nobody in administration, there's nobody in financial aid, there's nobody that *won't* help you." She contrasted this with her community college where she always had to "hustle" because "somebody was always giving you a hard time." When she needed to use a computer, rather than signing up for a one-hour session in the library like she did at her CUNY college, she could simply borrow a laptop as long as she needed it and could use it anywhere in the school. She loved that everyone in the school knew one another –it was only one floor of a building – "I've only been there a week and they're already saying hi to me." She appreciated the fact that she took her classes with all of the same students and that each class met once a week for four hours, providing time to ask questions and begin assignments. Furthermore, like in high school but unlike at her previous college, students in her new program studied together; the first week of class her cohort of students decided to meet on the weekend to review for an upcoming quiz together. Overall, Teresa was incredibly excited about her new school. She was finally a "college girl". She explained,

> I actually see myself as I'm actually in college. I never interacted with so many people before…it's been more opening for me. I'm noticing things that I never was

> before…Sitting next to one student we just started to chit chat – totally different backgrounds and in college…In [my old] college I would never be like that. I would be like, I'm just here to do my classes and then I'm leaving. At [my new school] I'm not like that at all.

Despite the positive experiences – and thus the increased persistence rates – Bridges graduates reported, in the end the preliminary results reflect the problems that come along with commercial colleges. While 50% of graduates who began at these schools completed a certificate or degree, they were seldom satisfied with what they found on the other end. One graduate who completed a for-profit school with an Associates Degree in hotel and restaurant management was working at a Starbucks, another with a certificate in restaurant management was working in a pool hall, a third with a certificate in computer programming was "waiting" for a job his school had promised to find for him. One graduate, with an Associates degree in hotel management, was working two retail jobs to repay her loans. When she decided it would be best to continue on for a BA, she received a list of where her credits would transfer, but none of the schools were within the New York City area. Another graduate, having completed her certificate to become a medical assistant, was working at a hospital where she had interned. While happy to have secured the placement, she was overwhelmed by the loans she had to pay back and "kind of regretting" having taken them out.[189]

Conclusions

As Niki, Wesley, Teresa, Malik, Charles and Maria moved through years two and three after graduating from Bridges their post-secondary journeys were shaped by a lot more than the traditional academic preparation many imagine to be most significant.

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[189] One parent with whom I conducted an informal interview said that she could not take out parent loans for her son because she had outstanding debt from when she attended a for-profit commercial college upwards of 15 years earlier.

Though they had been provided a high school education that more closely resembled what their middle-class counterparts had than what low-income students of color are typically afforded, the differences between the resources and supports they and their middle-class counterparts carried with them became all the more poignant in college. In order to navigate the complicated landscape and bureaucracy of higher education, Bridges graduates needed access to more knowledge, connections, and guidance; unfortunately, too often they could not readily find these things at their colleges or in their communities and so were left to fumble through decision-making on their own.

The complexities of a college-for-all approach are in part about what it means to prepare an academically heterogeneous population for higher education; but they are also about both the ways in which the institutions graduates move into are structured and the ways in which race, class, and socio-economic policy in America continue to challenge and shortchange low-income people of color. Despite the resolve on the part of many Bridges graduates to continue their education, and the ways in which they outperformed similar groups nation-wide, the odds seemed to increase each year they were out of high school. As Anyon (2005) argues, "Unless we make some changes in the way the macro-economy works, economic policy will trump not only urban school reform but the individual educational achievement of urban students as well." (p. 29)

Increasingly aware of the odds, and further constrained by the policies and practices of higher education, Bridges graduates needed to be able to answer critical questions for themselves they had unfortunately not considered prior to attending college, so that they could make informed decisions and feel in control of their futures. The following chapter will explore the ways in which small urban public schools like Bridges, institutions of

higher education, and larger socio-economic policy can better work collaboratively to make the post-secondary journeys of others like Niki, Wesley, Malik, Maria, Teresa, and Charles not only more manageable but also more satisfying. After all, it is what they too deserve.

Chapter Seven

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS
"BUT IS WHAT WE GIVE THEM ENOUGH?": THE POWER AND LIMITS OF SMALL SCHOOLS

Inching Towards Social Justice: The Role of Public Schools in the Struggle

When small size is used to change "the core of educational practice" (Elmore, 1996), small urban public schools outperform their comprehensive school counterparts with regards to attendance, academic achievement, rates of school violence, and college-acceptance rates (Ancess, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Darling-Hammond, Ancess, & Ort, 2002; Cotton, 2001; Gladden, 1998; Fine, 1994a, 2001; Howley, Strange, & Bickel, 2000; Klonsky, 1995; Lee & Loeb, 2000; Lee, Smith, & Croninger, 1995; Raywid, 1997; Stevenson, 2006; Wasley et al, 2000). This dissertation explored the under-examined yet critical space of small schools and college persistence. *What happens when graduates of a small urban public school move on to college? Is what their school struggled so hard to give them enough? How do graduates' post-secondary journeys speak to both the power and the limits of small school reform?*

As one of the many small schools in New York City that sets out to provide an academically heterogeneous population of low-income students of color an education resembling what students in elite private schools are afforded, Bridges aims to prepare all of its students for college. By many standards, the data show that in this area Bridges is also outperforming its comprehensive school counterparts (Mortenson, 2000) and overall national averages (See Table 1). Within a population where 78% of those graduates surveyed had parents who had never been to college, within 4-5 years of graduating from

Bridges: 96% had begun college;[190] 83% had completed one or more years of college; 72% were still attending or had already graduated college; 35% had completed a Bachelors degree, 13% an Associates degree, and 8% a program through a for-profit trade school. [191,192] Bridges graduates had received degrees from a range of colleges – Wesleyan University, SUNY Binghamton, Hobart William Smith, CUNY's New York City College of Technology, Dickinson, SUNY New Paltz, St. Johns College, CUNY's John Jay College, Manhattanville, CUNY's Medgar Evers, SUNY's Mohawk Community College, among others. Some graduated within four years, others within five, some with honors, and others without.[193]

Table 1: College Persistence and Completion Nationwide vs. Bridges[194]

	National (Ages 25-29)	National Black[195] (Ages 25-29)	National Latino (Ages 25-29)	NYC (25 and over)	Bridges (Ages 22-24) [196]	Bridges Black (Ages 22-24)	Bridges Latino (Ages 22-24)
Some College[197]	57.4%	50.2%	31.1%	47.8%	82%	84%	83%
Associates[198]	12%	16%	19%	5.2%	13%	16%	16%
Bachelors	28.4	17.2%	10%	15.8%	35%	33%	34%

[190] 50% of the remaining 4% had not begun college because, as Bengali females, they had arranged marriages upon graduation from high school. While they had applied to college, and were accepted, higher education for women was not a part of their cultural traditions. There was one Bengali female – from the class of 1998 who, upon introduction to her new husband and his family, negotiated to be able to attend college but this was not the trend among young women in her same situation.

[191] 82% of Bridges graduates from the classes on 1999 and 2000 who were surveyed had begun at 4-year colleges; 43% of these students had acquired a BA by 2004 with an additional 10% having acquired an Associates (two of these students attended colleges offering both Bachelors and Associates).

[192] Two of the students who had completed a for-profit trade school had received an Associates degree while the others had acquired certificates.

[193] Mortenson (2000) shows that for every 100 students who begin 9th grade in a comprehensive high school, 67 finish high school in four-years, 38 go to college, and 18 earn an associate's degree within three years or a bachelor's degree within six.

[194] National numbers come from 2003 US Census data compiled in "Educational Attainment in the United States: 2003" (US Census Bureau, 2004) and New York City numbers come from 2000 US Census data compiled in Census 2000 Summary File (US Census Bureau, 2000).

[195] "Black" is defined as African-American and Caribbean-American.

[196] Statistics on "Some College" were derived from sample of 90 – the graduating classes of 1999, 2000, 2001; statistics on Associates and Bachelors completion were derived from sample of 60, as the class of 2001, when surveyed, had not been in out of high school long enough for degree completion.

[197] "Some College" is defined as one or more years and includes those with Associates and Bachelors.

[198] Includes occupational and academic Associates degrees

This data illustrates that as one high-performing small school, Bridges has been able to instill in most of its graduates both a desire to continue their education and many of the skills needed to persist once there. At the same time, this dissertation spoke to two further questions: Why are these numbers higher than national averages? Why are they not as high as Bridges staff had hoped?

To answer the first question, Bridges numbers are higher not because the students whom Bridges serves come to high school more accomplished than their counterparts in neighboring comprehensive public high schools nor because Bridges is given more resources than these schools. Rather, despite these factors, in the spirit of institutional agency, Bridges structures its school and its classroom practices to fulfill its mission to prepare all students equally for the opportunity of college. Bridges college enrollment and persistence rates are higher because in a system where too many people give up on low-income students of color, small schools represent a continued faith in the democratic promise of public schooling. They are higher because this faith drives them to resist the status quo; teachers, holding out college as a hope for all students, galvanize tremendous energy and effort to equip students academically with what students need to get to college and ultimately stay the course. Classes are not tracked; all students have access to college guidance and are helped to apply to college; students and teachers engage in trusting relationships with one another; academic courses are designed for rigor and engagement; high-stakes standardized tests do not dictate standards; and teachers – in part because they are treated as professionals and given the power to shape practice – continually struggle to improve their classrooms and the school as a whole.

At the same time, Bridges teachers worry about whether or not all of their students will be academically prepared for "college-level" work, and they are, by and large, unsure of the degree to which other obstacles derail students' college journeys. Teachers wonder: *How much will issues of race and class shape graduates' journeys through college? In what ways will – and won't – the system of higher education meet their needs? To what extent will the political-economy limit what a college degree affords graduates with regards to economic stability and social mobility?*

The answers to these questions – and to the broader question of why college persistence and graduation rates are not as high as the founders of small schools and Bridges staff would have hoped – are difficult to parse out and address. In looking at the lived experiences of Bridges graduates, both what kept them going and what made them stumble, their journeys collectively demonstrate the complexity of implementing the college-for-all mission of Bridges and illustrate how bumpy the road through higher education is for low-income students of color. While setting out to prepare *all* students – regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, class, or previous academic record – for success in college is indeed the right, and just, thing to do, it is by no means an easy or always attainable goal. Standing in the way of small urban public schools are a host of challenges not present for well-resourced private and elite public schools with students mostly from college-educated families and/or those few low-income students who have been "creamed" from the top.

The complexity of the mission of small schools like Bridges is rooted in the realities of the "urban context" (Noguera, 2003) in which they exist and with which their low-income students of color contend on a daily basis. Beneath the inability of small schools

like Bridges to meet their vision is not their failure to, for example, provide rigorous instruction, nor even their ability to better guide students through the college-going process – though these factors can further help them to inch towards their goal. Rather it is the failure of society at large, and government policy in particular, to address the effects of social class and poverty within this country. As Anyon (2005) argues, "[M]acroeconomic policy like those regulating the minimum wage, job availability, tax credits, federal transportation, and affordable housing create conditions in cities that no existing educational policy or urban school reform can transcend." (p. 2) To this list can be added the inequities of federal and state funding for college financial aid.

Thus, the difference in academic achievement and degree attainment between low-income students of color and their white middle and upper-class peers – whether in K-12 or post-secondary schooling – is affected not only by what happens within the walls of their schools but significantly by what happens outside of them. With 38% of American children living at or beneath the poverty level – 57% of African-American and 64% of Latino children (Anyon, 2005, p. 64) – not only do the realities of inadequate health care or stable housing, for example, impair students' abilities to succeed academically in school (Rothstein, 2004) so too do inadequate financial aid and job opportunities for college graduates. [199] As Anyon (2005) questioned,

> How can a successfully reformed urban school benefit a low-income student of color whose graduation will not lead to a job on which to make a living because there are not enough such jobs, and will not lead to the resources of college completion? New curriculum, standardized tests, or even nurturing, democratic small schools do not create living-wage jobs, and do not provide poor students with the funds and supports for enough further education to make a difference in their lives. (p. 3)

[199] Children from low-income families' likelihood of having vision problems, for example, is twice that of normal rates due in part to inadequate pre-natal care; at the same time 20% of poor children are without health care. (Rothstein, 2004, p.41).

The journeys of Bridges graduates speak to the effects of these very issues, making transparent the ways in which class divisions within this country are cemented through inequitable access to education, limited economic opportunities, and unjust socio-economic policies that make achieving social mobility remarkably challenging for the poor.

These realities beg the larger question about the role of public school reform in the struggle for social justice – a topic that continues to be increasingly debated among academics (Anyon, 1997, 2005; Apple, 1995; Carlson & Gause, Forthcoming; Noguera, 2003; Rothstein, 2004). How much can knowledge, choice, and middle-class aspirations ensure the academic success and college degree attainment of low-income student of color? Moreover, what more is needed to ensure it? On the one hand, this study illustrates that schools do, indeed, have the power to mediate social inequality and improve the odds for at least some students; and on the other it further confirms the argument that school reform will never be enough (Anyon, 1997, 2005; Noguera, 2003; Rothstein, 2004).

Recognizing both conclusions, however, is essential in order to both honor the role individual and institutional agency can play in the struggle for social justice, and avoid the reasoning that macro-inequities explain inadequate schooling. There do need to be a host of changes made in society at large to achieve greater social justice, but schools cannot sit back and wait for that day to come. As Ira Shor warns, "teachers…may fall into a paralyzing trap of saying that everything must be changed at once or it isn't worth trying to change anything at all." (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 35)

Some of the same researchers and activists who argue that educational and social policy reform must be addressed in tandem, locate schools as essential spaces to work

within and through towards mediating social reproduction (Anyon, 2005; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993; Fine & Weis, 2001; Noguera, 2003). The reality is three-fold: in the absence of larger socio-economic changes successfully reformed urban schools, like Bridges, are young people's best hope at individual mobility; if – and when – there is adequate reform of socio-economic policies, there need to be successfully reformed public schools for young people to reap the benefits of the larger structural reforms; and finally, public schools can – and should – serve as a critical lever of social justice work.

What emerges through the journeys of Bridges graduates are several stories which speak to a central conflict this country now faces: the clear need for a college degree as a prerequisite for economic stability and social mobility (even if it is still not always enough) and just how difficult it is for low-income students of color to attain this degree. This conflict played out through the educational aspirations, desires, and experiences of Bridges graduates, whose stumbles (and falls) throughout their journeys were reflective not of resistance to achievement (MacLeod, 1995; Ogbu & Gibson, 1991; Willis, 1977) but rather of the multiple obstacles that came their way. It played out through the institutional agency of Bridges, a school that set out to give its academically-unscreened population of low-income students of color the same opportunities and experiences as their middle-class peers, and then through the ways graduates' opportunities shifted away from middle-class norms as they moved beyond high school. And it played out through the policies and practices of a system of higher education that, though it has opened its doors to a wider range of students, has not changed sufficiently to meet the varied needs of its newer and more diverse population of students.

Krei and Rosenbaum (2001) argue that the "failures" of students like those from Bridges within higher education are indicative of the fact that a college-for-all mission is misguided. As they state, "[t]he college-for-all approach is an unrealistic policy for these students" (p. 824).[200] This study suggests otherwise. The experiences of Bridges graduates show that despite the difficulties they face within higher education, and their stops and starts, many eventually overcome the obstacles and benefit significantly from their experiences. The question is not whether Bridges' mission of college for all is misguided – the wage differentials between college and non-college graduates, coupled with the increased difficulty of securing a living wage with benefits, has answered that for us (Anyon, 2005; Education Trust, 2001; Sassen, 2001). Rather the question is: *What can be done about the multiple obstacles put in the way of low-income students of color in attaining a degree and ultimately realizing the "American Dream"?*

Presented below are snapshots of where Charles, Malik, Maria, Niki, Teresa, and Wesley were in the summer of 2005 (and beyond). Together they reflect the achievements and challenges Bridges graduates faced as their pursued higher education. The chapter then presents implications which evolve out of this study for small schools, the system of K-12 education, the policies and practices of higher education, and the socio-economic and political-economic policy that shape the educational experiences of low-income students of color. Highlighted is the important role schools must play in the struggle for social and economic justice, as well as the ways in which they need to function as a part of a web of reforms that go beyond what happens inside school walls.

[200] "These students" are defined by Krei and Rosenbaum (2001) as those of "modest achievement or uncertain motivation" (p.825).

* * *

Looking Closely: Summer 2005 and Beyond

Niki, after attending her new SUNY college for a full academic year, concluded that her initial skepticism of the school was unfounded. What she realized was that all colleges have their strengths and their weakness. She explained, "It's had its ups and it's had its downs. There are some classes that I really like and some classes that I don't like which is like any other school." There continued to be, of course, times when things became difficult and Niki wanted to quit. Some of her courses were challenging, and, while she worried less about paying tuition, money was still a struggle – by her second year at her new college she left campus every Thursday, returning late Sunday, to work 35 hours at a supermarket in New York City. What kept her going?: financial pressure –"I can't lose my financial aid package…If I fall below a 3.1, I would lose my academic scholarship…that's seven-thousand dollars right down the drain. Can't do that;" the support of family at home and friends on-campus;[201] and finally recognition for her persistence– "I get recognition from almost *everybody* that knows me…you feel recognized for your work and that kind of makes you want to continue to do good." With a major in psychology and a minor in marketing, Niki was on track to graduate after four and a half years spent at two colleges and then attend graduate school – in what, she was still unsure.

Wesley graduated with a Bachelors degree on May 22nd 2006, four years after he began college. Having learned how to navigate college he believed he got through, in part, because of the connections he had made at his college. He made sure to always take courses with friends so "they can help me out or we can help each other out;" he was "real close" with the Dean; and he even knew the President of his university. While Wesley did not know exactly what he wanted to do with a business degree, he did know what his immediate next step would be: graduate school for business. He hoped it would be at the Business School at his college, explaining, "I've been going here for the past four years, and that's home to me." Convinced graduate school was necessary – he could not even find a summer job or internship that was not in retail – he felt particularly lucky that his 9/11 scholarship would cover tuition. "I'll probably be 23 by the time I get my Masters – that's not bad," he said with pride. As Wesley moved through college he continued to be devoted to bringing together his two worlds– home and school. "You can never forget where you come from," he explained. "Because that's your existence…I'm still the same Wesley I've been for the past nineteen years and I don't think I'm better than [people on my block] because I have a better education…I know the dudes on my block realize that I have this golden opportunity." At his graduation his mother wept. She explained with pride that she was one of eight children, Wesley one of fifteen grandchildren on her side, and Wesley was the first in the family to become a college graduate.

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[201] Niki had joined an African-American sorority, and Ava transferred to her new college, so they were together once again.

Teresa, after leaving community college for a for-profit training school, believed she was on the right track. Having spent only three months out of college she wanted to go back and was convinced she needed to "pick the school I want to attend" and pick it "fast." In the end, she was relieved to find what she had been looking for all along at her for-profit school. While she did not carry with her any of the credits she acquired at her community college, she believed her experiences there were important and was proud that she had generally done well there. Teresa was surprised, however, that her college journey had taken her in the directions it had. "I mean, I never ever ever thinking back, ever – [when] we sat [talking] in that library in Bridges [senior year] – I never thought it would be like this," she explained. "I never thought anything of this kind was going to happen to me – I thought I was just going to go to [the four-year CUNY] – do what I have to do. Join in one of those community thingies – just be a regular or typical college student." Like her sister, whose footsteps she had pledged three years earlier she would not follow in, she had lost her opportunity to attend a four-year CUNY and ended up at a for-profit school. Despite the change of course, however, she was proud. "I give myself a lot of props or pats on the back for being where I'm at and actually not giving up," she explained. "A lot of stuff has happened…to me and I'm not letting destiny just go by itself. I'm actually controlling it now. I'm not leaving it in anyone's hands. I'm the one making it happen and that's pretty cool. I'm pretty comfortable. I can say I'm a grown-up."

Malik spent one year at a community college taking everything from Speech to the History of Ancient Greece to African American Women Writers – managing his work schedule to accommodate his course schedule. While he liked a few of his classes, he wished he were taking more business and accounting courses to see if that was the right career direction for him and also found himself frustrated with the instruction, particularly in the remedial courses. He was also disappointed with the campus culture – while he had hoped, most of all, for a community of learners, he found that no one spent time outside of class on campus. "Everyone's pretty much doing their own thing," he explained. Once again he was questioning his career direction and furthermore, he began to worry that an Associates degree from a community college would not open up many opportunities to him. This, coupled with family issues and financial stresses that had begun to surface by the end of his first year in community college, led Malik to take time off from college. He found himself exploring the possibility of a for-profit trade school once again: he attended an open house for one, spoke with a representative at another, and began to consider air conditioning repair. At the same time, unsure that he would do well with a career like that, and still wary of the promises of these schools, he decided the investment for these schools was too great a risk. He also took a real estate course and was preparing for the real estate exam but decided this was not a good career direction after learning mid-way through the course that brokers work on commission only. [202] Malik's plan in July 2005 was to re-enroll in his community college in the spring, despite

[202] I connected Malik to a real estate broker I knew who contacted me to see if I knew anyone who could help with an open house she was running. Given that Malik was looking for ways to earn money at the time, I referred him. He became interested in exploring the field. The broker's firm offered to sponsor his fee for the required real estate course.

his frustrations, complete his real estate training course, and find a job that was not in retail.

Maria, who stopped-out of college after her first year, talked about missing school but was the least resolved about returning. She did wish she were still engaged in academics and, at the very least, wanted the space her residential college had afforded her – living in a two bedroom apartment with five, sometimes seven people, was an on-going strain. She believed she needed to go back just to be able to make ends meet in the future – "I don't want to spend the rest of my life having little jobs here and there, because it ain't cuttin' it for me," she explained. At the same time, Maria continued to waffle when it came to returning. She did not want to petition to return to her first college, yet she was also not convinced she should go to college in New York City. None of her friends were in college, though some of them were trying to complete their GEDs. She did call NYU and Columbia but learned she would have to raise her GPA at a community college before an application could be considered. She thought about enrolling in a community college but life always seemed to get in the way. When she had planned to visit a community college in October 2004, she delayed because she had injured her foot in a fight while at a night club.

Maria was rarely home (it was actually never clear where home was); she only sometimes had a cell phone; and while I tracked her down at her jobs, by the time I got there she was often no longer employed. In February of 2005 I contacted Maria at her mother's house and discovered she had enrolled in a community college. Someone from the Upward Bound program she had participated in while in high school, which was housed at a local community college, called her to find out how she was doing. When she learned Maria was not in school, she offered to help her to enroll in that community college; within five minutes this administrator had organized all of Maria's paperwork. Maria explained what happened next, "I [went] and met with three ladies and a man – the man was director of admissions. I got full financial aid – so my mom doesn't have to pay for anything, but I got no money for books." She continued, "But then I got arrested for trespassing and when the cops arrested me they found a bag of weed on me. Then they threw me into a program…[that] pays for my books and gives me free tutoring. They also give me a curfew – so I have to be home by 9:30 every night." Maria was not happy "stuck" living with her mother, but she was making do and mostly hoped she was "ready" for college. She was taking three classes, including remedial English.[203] Mid-way through the semester Maria had already stopped going to both remedial English and one other class.

Charles, after returning to his original college, had completed a full year in much better academic standing than in his first year. Consequently, he would be able to keep his funding. While he continued to struggle with many of the same issues he faced in his first year, he was doing more to make sense of and overcome them. He still had a difficult

[203] Maria's SAT math score was high enough to place out of remedial math, but her verbal score required her to take the exam; furthermore, while a 75 on a English Language Arts Regents exempts students from taking the remedial test, she scored a 73 on that when in high school. Within two class periods her remedial instructor had commented that he was "astounded" by Maria's writing and perplexed as to why she was placed within a remedial course.

time with other students who "know more than me" and struggled to complete his work fearing it would not be good enough. At the same time he was trying to cope with this, initiating meetings with me as well as professors and advisors, and tried to understand his situation from a socio-political-historical perspective. He reminded himself of the ways in which inequitable schooling in America often under-serves low-income students of color and linked sociological trends to historical ones. He did what he could to convince himself that he was not so different from his classmates, "Sometime I feel like I am better than them," he admitted. "And that might not be the way to go, but it helps…me to get my work done." Finally he had found a career focus; he would major in Education Studies so that he could intervene in a "school system that pretty much sets out to do harm to its own students." Charles spent more time in the HEOP office, in part frustrated by his living situation and still unable to afford a dorm, but also because he took comfort in the other students – his "family" – and the free computer access.[204] Charles was clearer than ever, "I *want* to be in college." Not only did he generally enjoy going, it was and always had been his dream. As he continued to walk a shaky fence he worried that "at any moment" just as he was "improving," he could be asked to leave and that "would be the height of embarrassment." He was emphatic, "I don't want to fuck this up. Not again – because I would be failing myself more than anyone else. And I wouldn't know what to do after that." By June 2006 Charles had completed another year at college, this time with all Bs, and was contemplating taking a semester abroad for his junior year.

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The Implications

When Dennis Littky (2000) sought to discover how graduates of his small public high school fared in college, he promised, "We will learn from our kids who get through the system and from those who become sidetracked and overwhelmed. Our school will adjust to the lessons they provide." (p. 167) The stories of Bridges and its graduates show that indeed there are adjustments to be made in small schools, and several specific recommendations are outlined below. They also show that critical changes need to be made within the overall K-16 school system and socio-economic policy within the United States; several recommendations for these arenas follow as well. As small schools like Bridges listen closely to the implications of this work, and set out to make changes to

[204] Charles was highly distressed to learn that HEOP would lose that student work space when they were moved to a small office in another building on campus at the end of the academic year. The loss of the one place on campus where he, and other HEOP students, felt comfortable and a sense of belonging led Charles to question the college's commitment to students like him.

realize their vision, these other arenas need to listen closely as well and ultimately come together towards a comprehensive and equitable approach to the opportunity of college success for all.[205]

Small Schools and the K-12 Education System: The Adjustments

There is a lot that high performing small schools do well towards college-readiness. Perhaps most importantly, they directly counter the low-expectations schools often have of low-income students of color and create intellectual environments that inspire their students to want to learn. At the same time, as they bring many of their students along in their vision, small schools have not always provided students with the knowledge they need to make informed choices about their futures and to navigate the college-going process. The explanations for this are many; some grow out of the realities of the system of secondary schooling, some out of the needs of low-income students of color, and some out of the experiences and backgrounds of teachers and administrators. Regardless of the reasons, and despite the constraints schools face, there are ways in which small schools can "adjust" based on the lessons learned.

There are two key methods small schools like Bridges use in their approach to schooling: a focus on inquiry-driving teaching, in hopes of placing students at the helm of their learning and fostering a sense of ownership over it, and a process of "planning backwards" (Wiggins & McTighe, 2006) for curriculum development. With regards to the latter, a common practice in small schools is for educators to question what students need to know and be able to do by the end of a lesson, a unit, a year, and ultimately high school, and then plan their courses of study to achieve those end goals. The same process

[205] Throughout this section on implications, several specific programs have been cited within the footnotes. These programs and resources are highlighted because of their effectiveness and usefulness in addressing the high school-to-college transition with low-income students of color.

can be used around college-readiness. Specifically, small schools need to plan for and around students' understandings of the landscape of higher education, the costs of college, and the landscape of careers; make the college search and choice process manageable for students; help students to learn to navigate higher education bureaucracies; increase family involvement; diversify teaching staffs and provide professional development around college-readiness; along with maintaining and further developing academic rigor. While the list is long and daunting in many respects, not confronting these challenges leaves students to manage far too much on their own when they get to higher education. Each of these areas is further developed below, with a summary of the issues at play followed by a set of recommendations to small schools.

Knowledge and Understanding of the Landscape of Higher Education, Careers, and the Costs of College

The Issues

As the experiences of Bridges graduates have illustrated, students need to develop a greater understanding of the landscape of higher education, careers, and the costs of college-going in order to make informed choices. While small schools effectively send the message to their students that they should set college as a goal, they do not directly address the lack of knowledge around these issues with which their students enter high school.

Many Bridges students begin high school not knowing the differences between private and public colleges, liberal arts and vocational programs, Associates and Bachelors degrees; and unfortunately when they head off to college they have only a marginally more developed understanding. Middle-class students, surrounded by family members and friends who attended college, go into high school knowing these things;

however, low-income students who will be in the first in their families to attend college must learn them along the way (Bloom, 2006). Without visiting colleges throughout high school or developing and exploring their own questions about the college-going process, many of them maintain the only images of higher education that are accessible to them – those that come from movies and TV. On the one hand, this leaves some wondering, as they apply, whether or not college is for them, and on the other it often results in unmet expectations when they begin.

Similarly, while middle and upper class students are, by and large, comfortable with the notion of a liberal arts education – both because they understand the flexibility and grounding it affords and because they are confident that they will find a job and/or attend graduate school after completing their BA – this attitude is a luxury not available to most low-income students. As Bridges graduates faced the obstacles of higher education, and more pointedly the costs of it, they and their families wanted to know why they were there and that there would be pay-offs on the other end. Unfortunately, graduates worked from far too limited knowledge of careers and how specific careers connect to certain academic courses of study. Thus they had a difficult time making informed decisions. Maria contemplated pre-med but did not like science; Teresa was focused on accounting though she was weakest in math and eventually sought easy answers from a for-profit college; Malik searched for a career direction but could not figure out one that would lend itself to a major in writing; and Niki contemplated becoming a business major – despite her lack of interest in it – as she worried that psychology would limit her to being a counselor.

Lastly, financial issues clearly factored greatly into graduates' journeys through college. While clearly financial aid policy needs to change to better serve low-income students and spiraling costs of tuition must be reversed (this will be addressed below), small schools need to better prepare their students for the present realities of college costs so that they can both make informed decisions about where they attend college and plan for the bills they will ultimately face. Too many Bridges graduates and their families were unsure of what their aid packages entailed; they were taken aback by the cost of books (or even having to pay for them),[206] lab fees, transportation fees, and residential college life; and they were surprised by having to take out numerous loans beginning in year one and continuing as they moved through college. Educators are understandably reticent to lay out the realities of college costs to their students, but assuring them that "there is plenty of money out there" or advising them not to worry about it until they get in is not the approach to take. As Bloom (2005) argued, there is a critical importance in "speaking out loud" (p. 80) about issues of money and financial aid with low-income students and their families throughout the college application process. "[I]t is exactly by speaking about students' fears, by acknowledging the importance of the very real difficulties and risks of reaching for mobility through the avenue of college, and by providing technical information early on," Bloom writes, "that teachers can help students to feel in control of their futures." (p. 80)

Recommendations

Small schools cannot change what their students come into high school knowing about higher education, careers, and the costs of college, but they can shape what

[206] On average, one college textbook costs more than $100; college students, collectively, pay over 6 billion dollars per year on books (Sanchez, 2006).

students walk out understanding. Schools can do this by using what they know about effective instructional practice and applying it to understanding higher education. They should begin in 9th grade (or earlier) using an inquiry-based approach – starting with students' questions to enable students to guide the process of college and career exploration for themselves. Then schools must create opportunities for students to explore the answers.[207] The intention of beginning early is so that, over their four years of high school, students can develop a working understanding of what it means to apply and go to college; with this knowledge they can ultimately be empowered to make informed choices about their futures. The emphasis on using an inquiry-based approach ensures that students can begin to take control over their own college-going process early on and feel ownership over it.[208]

Specifically, within the context of existing school structures (e.g. advisories or electives), students should engage in activities to develop more knowledge in each of these areas. In part to counter stereotypes they hold of "college," students should investigate a range of colleges (2-year, 4-year, public, private, small, large, liberal arts, career-focused, for-profit schools), the majors they offer, and what they look for in applicants. Students should do this by: reviewing printed materials (e.g. viewbooks, course catalogues, college guidebooks, applications, statistics on individual colleges around persistence and completion, etc.) and web-sites; going on interactive college

[207] The Institute for Urban Education at Lang College The New School has developed a curriculum resource binder, entitled "College Explorers," intended to help small schools use an inquiry approach to exploring college, careers, and the costs of college with students.

[208] The issue of the importance of ownership and control over the college-decision making process became increasingly evident as Malik, Teresa, and Charles all tried to find their way back to college. As they took control of their own transfer processes, their investment levels increased, as did their ability to gather the information needed to make informed decisions.

visits;[209] conducting interviews with college students, college graduates, and college faculty and staff; and participating in mock admissions committees. With regards to paying for college, students should analyze examples of student-awarded financial aid packages (those which include room, board and other fees in the overall cost)[210] to understand both the real costs of college and the types of aid available. They should also explore the different types of private scholarships available, to understand that there are need and merit-based ones, as well as several that may be targeted to students based on demographic backgrounds and special interests. They should engage in budgeting activities within their junior and senior years to plan not only for tuition but also for the cost of books, transportation, and food, among other things; and they should analyze the actual costs of for-profit schools in conjunction with data on what they do and do not afford graduates. Finally, with regards to career exploration – specifically helping students to discover the types of career paths that match their strengths, weaknesses, and interests and to understand how those career paths connect to paths of study in college – they should be exposed to a range of professions through career interviews, career fairs, and career websites and should be guided to hone in on their interests and connect them to courses of study. [211]

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[209] The Institute for Urban Education at Lang College The New School has designed an interactive approach to the college-visit which includes having high school students first conduct a scavenger hunt around campus – placing them in the position to find specific offices and ask students and staff members a host of questions – and then conduct interviews with professors, deans, and admissions officers, among others. In comparison to traditional college tours, this interactive visit reflects an inquiry-driven approach and helps students to begin to both experience being on a college campus and practice their help-seeking and communication skills.

[210] College websites list tuition costs and then provide applicants with a realistic estimate for a year of college costs once books and other fees are factored in.

[211] A particularly good career websites is www.careercrusing.com as it provides students with a survey to assess and identify potential career directions, details projections about job-availability for their city/region within those careers, and connects students to colleges that offer appropriate courses of study for those careers.

Managing the Exploration Process: Targeted Choices

The Issues

While all high school students need to know a fair amount about different colleges in order to decide where to apply and ultimately where to go, there is a particularly large burden on first-generation students who come in knowing little and have not already weeded out parts of the system of higher education for themselves. Students coming from college-educated families, particularly those from elite backgrounds, have already discounted several options by the time they reach the point of making lists and choosing where to go; that is, they work from a relatively small pool of institutions when they are exploring higher education. The approach advocated above sends the message to first-generation college students that all different types of colleges are open to them and it is for them to decide the right match. While important in many respects, the danger of this approach is that students are likely to become overwhelmed when presented with too many choices and, as a result, shut down and make no choice at all.

Recommendations

While small schools cannot decide for their students where they should go to college, they can work to reduce the overwhelming nature of a decision-making process that students come in knowing little about. They can do this by establishing a set of feeder schools to create a K-16 pipeline for their students, a common practice among elite private schools (Cookson & Persell, 1985). In establishing relationships with a group of feeder colleges, schools can focus on public and private, residential and commuter, and liberal arts and vocational institutions that have positive track records with low-income

students of color.[212] In doing this, they can also prioritize sending graduates to college through a "posse approach,"[213] whereby students attend college in groups either from within or across small schools. This allows students the critical support of other students who can provide a bridge for them across environments and act as a support system throughout higher education (Terenzini et al, 1994). Such peer support is particularly important for those students attending either commuter colleges or schools where the student population is predominately White.

Navigating the Bureaucracy of College and Family Involvement

The Issues

The logistical details that Bridges students had to manage as they moved through higher education were daunting, and, while their parents were generally supportive of their post-secondary plans, they often did not have nor did they receive the knowledge to help their children with those critical logistics. Bridges teachers often questioned the degree to which they helped their students with the details when they were applying to college – completing applications, FAFSA forms, proofreading college essays, making phone calls, etc. – yet several believed they were doing for their students what many middle and upper class parents do for their own children (Bloom, 2006). As one principal of a small school commented,

> Our school does what many middle class families do. Kids can ask their parents, 'What do you think about this? What do you know about this topic?' But a lot of

[212] The College Results database reports persistence and graduation rates for individual colleges according to race, ethnicity, gender and class. Go to: http://www.collegeresults.org. Exploring this database with students is an important part of their inquiry into higher education.

[213] The Posse Foundation is an organization that provides full tuition scholarships to low-income students attending a selection of the country's top private colleges. Each year small cohorts of students – a "posse" – are sent to the same school. The belief behind the Posse Foundation is that bringing together small groups of diverse students, and training them in leadership skills, can help both individual students succeed in college and serve as a catalyst to transform campus cultures to be more reflective of a multi-cultural student population. 90% of the students attending college through the Posse Foundation complete their degrees. For more information go to http://www.possefoundation.org.

> our kids don't have those resources, so we teach them how to advocate for themselves, how to find adults who will have helpful relationships with them. (Davidson, 2006a, p.7, p.15)

While this is true, parents of Bridges graduates needed, and often wanted, to know more. Wesley's mother admitted before he began college that she was unsure of the costs of college and upset that she was not more involved in the application; she had only met the Bridges college counselor once, in passing, and found herself wishing there had been workshops on helping students pick the right college, finding scholarships, and supporting them once in college. Niki's mother was frustrated that her daughter assumed she could not help with anything related to college and thus kept her out of the process entirely. While Teresa wanted to go away to college, her father would not let her; his constraints ultimately made her choices for her. Furthermore, her parents' lack of understanding about her responsibilities as a college student made it difficult for her to focus on her work while living at home.

What low-income students of color ultimately need are two things: as they move toward and into college they need their parents to better understand the process and the issues so they can serve as supports for their children, and – whether it is fair or not – students need to be able to better manage a host of the logistics on their own.

The Recommendations

Few would argue that family involvement is important to student achievement and small schools, like Bridges, value this very involvement. At the same time, as Lareau (2000) argued, it is not that parents' interest in their children's education differs across class but rather that having access to different resources yields different educational advantages. As such, particularly around the high school-to-college transition, small

schools need to work with families to develop a greater body of knowledge and access to more resources. After all, once students graduate from high school it is their families who travel alongside them through post-secondary education, not their high school teachers or counselors.

Small schools need to do two things. 1) They must invite parents into the college process earlier by providing information sessions, establishing one-on-one meetings to work out shared understandings and goals around college-going, and facilitating parent-led support groups on transitioning to college alongside their children.[214] 2) Schools must scaffold independence for their students around the logistics of applying and going to college – teaching them to manage them on their own by having students make follow-up phone calls to admissions offices, inquire about financial aid packages, and develop organization systems and follow-up strategies for paperwork received. As Bridges graduates' journeys revealed, these issues do not disappear once students are in college.

Diversifying Teaching Staffs and Professional Development

The Issues

One poignant issue at Bridges with regards to preparing students for the high-school-to-college transition was the ways in which staff members' own post-secondary experiences guided the advice they gave about college and shaped the messages they sent to their students. For example, teachers at Bridges who attended private, liberal arts, residential colleges too often allowed this image to define how they portrayed college to

[214] Support groups led by parents of alumni – those who have already seen their children through the college application and transition process – are particularly important with regard to issues that are particular to certain ethnic groups. For example, several Latina students explained that their parents would not allow them to go away to college, even if this was what they wanted to do. While a teacher or counselor might be able to broach these issues with families, if they are not from the same cultural background, the issues are, at times, beyond their complete understanding. Furthermore, parents would likely appreciate hearing from other parents who have shared the same concerns and values, but who allowed their children to make other choices for themselves.

their students; those who attended commuter public colleges did the same. Some teachers who attended college with full financial aid packages, or who without hesitating took out loans, assumed their students could do the same, and those who did not have to worry about money did not know what to assume. Without an accurate understanding of the issues at play for their students and a more grounded understanding of the landscape of higher education, the messages educators send to students are often misguided and, in the end, problematic for the ways in which their students make decisions about if and where to attend college.

The Recommendations

First, it is critical for small schools to attract and maintain diverse teaching staffs, with teachers whose backgrounds are reflective of the students they teach. At the same time, this goal is constrained by the realities of who teaches given the lack of financial incentives to enter the field. Moreover, this step alone is still not enough. The benefits of a diverse teaching staff will only be capitalized upon if educators have opportunities to dialogue about critical issues that affect approaches to working with young people of different backgrounds. Schools therefore need to provide staff development on the issue of the high school to college transition. Within the context of these meetings, teachers should: explore their own experiences with preparing for and attending college; learn more about key issues and trends that affect low-income college students of color; further develop their understanding of different types of college experiences, including learning about the realities of for-profit colleges; and together determine how to shift their practice and develop structures through which to address college-readiness more broadly within their schools.

Academic rigor

The Issues

Despite the fact that it is difficult to define what "college-level" work is, the academic intensity and quality of a student's high school curriculum remains key to persistence (Adelman, 2002). Students in small schools need access to rigorous course work in all subject areas. Furthermore, they need to know that they have been given college-preparatory coursework in order to provide them with confidence as they move into college.[215] While small schools like Bridges have made great strides in this area, they need to maintain their focus on rigor and continue to bolster it, particularly in math and science (Bensman, 1995; Davidson, 2006a). They must also move students towards greater independence in managing academic demands; when surveyed, 42% of Bridges graduates who had stopped-out of college attributed their decision, in part, to the difficulties of adjusting to the independence they were afforded in college.

Recommendations

The greatest challenges to maintaining, and increasing, academic rigor are budget constraints and standardized testing policies. Thus, increasing rigor begins with the larger policy recommendations of equitable school finance and the abolition of high-stakes tests. While noting the need for such broader reforms – and urging small schools to continue to fight existing policies[216, 217] – there are key steps that small schools can take.

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[215] While tracking has many disadvantages, those students who are in college-preparatory tracks *believe* they have been prepared for college-level work. This belief can have an important effect on their self-perception as they move into higher education.

[216] As noted in earlier chapters, the New York Performance Standards Consortium represents a group of 28 schools from across New York State fighting high-stakes exams. Believing that "one size does not fit all" and that high stakes exams present obstacles to the college preparation of low-income students of color in particular, the Consortium has successfully fought to maintain a system of performance assessment standards and to be excused from all but two (English Language Arts plus one other) of the State's five high stakes exams. For more information see: http://performanceassessment.org.

First, given that research has shown that high school exit exams do not correlate with college entry exams and standards (Conley, 2003; Kirst & Venezia, 2004), and therefore do not adequately prepare students for college – but that performance-assessment tasks do (Foote, 2006) – schools can continue to develop and maintain systems of performance-assessment. At the same time, given that testing is a large part of assessment in many colleges, small schools need to ensure that students are given a variety of school-designed tests and prepared for any relevant city and state college entry exams.[218] Third, small schools can network with one another to provide advanced coursework to those students bound for competitive colleges, connect students to pre-college academic enrichment programs,[219] and/or collaborate with universities offering dual enrollment programs to high school students.[220] These courses and programs will not only further advance students' academic abilities, they will also help students transition onto campuses and into classrooms with more diverse student populations. Lastly, small schools need to scaffold academic independence across the four years of high school. While students need help throughout high school and college, they must also be prepared

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[217] The Center for Fiscal Equity in New York City successfully won a lawsuit against the state, on behalf of city schools, for more equitable funding for New York City high schools. At the same time, as with other States where similar victories have occurred, the changes that need to be made for urban schools to receive the extra funds are continually stalled by state legislatures (Anyon, 1997; Gittell, 1998). The CFE vs. State of New York lawsuit was an important step and example of what can happen when schools and parents fight for what they need and deserve; at the same time, it was settled March 15th 2005 and no new funding formulas had been established by June 2006. As schools like Bridges struggle to provide advanced science classes with no real labs and gym classes without a regulation gym, change cannot come soon enough. For more information see http://www.cfequity.org.

[218] For small schools in New York, specifically, students need to be prepared for the CUNY Assessment test, or students will find themselves stuck in remedial classes. With high numbers of small school graduates attending CUNYs, schools need to be proactive in ensuring their students do not get placed in remedial courses which stymie student progress.

[219] Pre-college programs that have shown to be effective include: Upward Bound, Double Discovery, and Trio programs (Tierney, W., Corwin, Z., & Colyar, J., 2005; Hagedorn, L. & Tierney, W., 2002). It is important to note that, along with cuts in financial aid for college students, have come cuts to these federally-funded pre-college programs.

[220] There are several dual-enrollment programs nationwide. In New York City alone, CollegeNow through the CUNY system, the Institute for Urban Education through Eugene Lang College The New School for Liberal Arts, and NYU all offer this option.

to not have those supports as readily available when they enter higher education. This does not mean they should be expected to move through college without any assistance or to write a perfect paper on their first draft; that is not what their middle-class counterparts who travel with the supports of their families do. Rather they need to be better prepared to manage the independence college affords and know where and how to seek help when they need it. [221]

Higher Education: Access and Outcome

The experiences of Bridges graduates reinforce much of what has been documented about the problems within higher education. Namely low-income students of color struggle with all of following: issues of racism (Rendon & Hope, 1996), the challenge of living between two (or among many) cultures (London, 1989, 1992), alienation from campus communities (Tinto, 1987), finances (Mumpers, 1996; Paulsen & St. John, 2002), a lack of tacit knowledge needed to navigate the system (Arnold, 1995), and classroom practice (Swail et al, 2003; Tinto, 1997). While the media and policy makers more often than not attribute low persistence rates in college to preparation on the part of high schools, there are a few voices calling for more accountability on the part of higher education to address these very issues (see Hagedorn & Tierney, 2002; Rendon & Hope, 1996; Gonzales, 1998; Swail et al, 2003; Tierney, 1992; Tinto, 1997). As Swail et al (2003) wrote, "The ultimate question is simple – what can an institution do to help each student get through college? Additionally, how can institutions help integrate

[221] One small school designed 2nd semester senior year like college – offering electives, longer and less frequent classes, and more independent reading and writing. The principal explained, "After the kids apply to college we work on transitions. How are you going to register for courses? What's going to happen if you do need help with writing?" (Davidson, 2006a).

students, both academically and socially, into the campus, as well as support their cognitive and social development?" (p.56)

There are several examples, both within the experiences of Bridges graduates and within the literature on higher education, that can be looked to for more specific guidance on how to answer these question. Outlined below are the key areas and promising practices higher education institutions should consider in confronting their responsibility to address the achievement gap within post-secondary schooling.

The Adjustments: Pedagogy in Higher Education

The Issues

Despite Bridges graduates intellectual commitments to learning, they were too often disappointed by what they found within their college classrooms. Their experiences are representative of what the literature documents about pedagogy in higher education: classes are more often than not a "spectator sport" (Fischer & Grant, 1983 in Tinto, 1997) with little student participation (Tinto, 1997) and are too often taught by under-qualified and/or unprepared professors. This is in part a function of the subordinate role that classroom teaching often plays in the larger job description of academics – and moreover in what gets recognized towards tenure – and a resulting lack of accountability around the development of curriculum and teaching. It is also, in part, a function of a political economy of higher education that has resulted in many colleges, particularly public ones, hiring less experienced or qualified adjunct professors and graduate students to teach, rather than increasing the number of tenured track faculty on staff (Aronowitz, 2000).[222] While many college students' academic experiences are affected by this, for low-income

[222] As a doctoral student, I received a flier at the beginning and end of each semester announcing a non-required, non-credit bearing course that met for one-half a semester, on college teaching. For many doctoral students planning to be professors, this is all they are offered to support the development of their teaching.

students of color facing a host of other obstacles to persistence, what happens inside of their college classes becomes a critical factor in persistence. At the same time, while the one common denominator for all college students is that they attend classes, few of the explanations of student persistence through higher education make a connection between classroom practice and student retention (Swail et al, 2003; Tinto, 1997). Consequently, few of the recommendations around how to integrate students into college target classrooms as a space through which to do this. Yet as Swail et al (2003) argue, "The continued development of curricula and pedagogical practices is perhaps the most important and fundamental need that colleges must address in terms of student retention." (p. 77)

Recommendations

In essence, colleges need to engage in the type of pedagogical and curricular transformation that reforming secondary schools have tackled. While the media and policy makers go to great lengths to critique the work of K-12 education, in reality there have been many more efforts within this realm resulting in more effective practice than within higher education (Swail et al, 2003). In general, coursework in college needs to address a greater range of material with regards to race, class, gender, culture and sexuality (Rendon & Hope, 1996; Gonzalez, 1998; Garcia & Smith, 1996) and teaching methods need to shift from ones that are teacher-centered and passive to ones that are student-centered, dialogic, and collaborative, (Cross, 1999; Garcia & Smith, 1996; Hurtado, 2002). Beyond that, higher education must begin to prioritize the development of effective pedagogy within the job descriptions of faculty, hold professors accountable to university-developed teaching standards, and re-allocate their budgets to ensure that

every faculty member who is teaching a course – regardless of the level of that course – is qualified to do so.

Given the belated though critical realization of the importance of pedagogy to persistence, there are colleges and researchers that have begun to address teaching practice and student classroom experiences writ large. Some schools have focused on faculty – providing opportunities to develop their teaching methods (Garcia & Smith, 1996) and recruiting a more diverse faculty and administration (Rendon & Hope, 1996; Harris & Nettles, 1996; Mayo et al, 1995), and others have focused on students – creating small learning communities and collaborative study strategies (Gardiner, 1994; Hummel & Steele, 1996; Tinto, 1997; Treisman, 1992). Tinto (1997) highlights the importance of colleges, both residential and commuter, which have focused on the latter, restructuring classroom experiences around small learning communities. Research shows that students enrolled through these or other similar programs show greater gains and greater persistence than students enrolled through regular classes (Gardiner, 1994; Hummel & Steele, 1996; Tinto, 1997; Treisman, 1992). As Tinto (1997) argued,

> It is evident that participation in a collaborative or shared learning group enables students to develop a network of support…that helps bond students to the broader social communities of the college while also engaging them more fully in the academic life of the institution…Second, it is apparent that students are influenced by participating in a setting in which sources of learning come from a variety of perspectives beyond that of one faculty member….Third…student perceptions of intellectual gain as well as academic performance as measured by GPA were greater in the learning community settings than in the more traditional learning settings. (pp. 613-614)

Beyond the creation of small learning communities, the implications of this research are many, and include the following: tenure policies should prioritize classroom teaching alongside research and publication; doctoral students planning to teach at the

college level should be required to take credit-bearing courses in curriculum development and teaching practice; institutions of higher education should create and/or further develop centers that provide support to faculty on teaching practice; systems, like CUNY, that require students to take non-credit remedial courses must have qualified instructors to guide students through exam material; and rather than policy proposals focusing on secondary schools learning from the standards expected in college, there should opportunities created for dialogic exchanges between high schools and colleges around issues of standards and teaching practice.

The Adjustments: Integration into College Life

The Issues

As the experiences of Bridges graduates illustrated, those students who were integrated onto their college campuses, whether through academics or social activities, were more likely to persist than those who were not. Those surveyed who had completed their degrees or were still in college cited as most important to their persistence the supports they received at their colleges – New York State's Opportunity Programs, friends, professors and faculty members. While, as described above, the college classroom is frequently neglected as a central space through which students can integrate into college life, unfortunately there are often few other spaces on campuses to foster this.

Institutions that are interested in student achievement and improving attainment rates need to do more to facilitate their students' integration, particularly low-income students of color, into college-life. Social integration theory fails to recognize that the issue of students' failure to integrate into their campuses lies not only in the students themselves, but moreover in the structures and practices of their institutions. When

students of color "fail" or leave college, it is not necessarily because they did not acculturate, but rather because the college did not change to meet their needs (Tierney, 1992; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). As such, colleges need to think about the various ways their institution can (and does) facilitate student integration.

The Recommendations

Overall, alongside making more of a commitment to diversity (Hurtado, 2002; Rendon, 1992; Vining-Brown, 1996), colleges need to ensure that they offer strong advising programs, mentoring, tutoring, and career counseling (Swail et al, 2003). The best example of such institutional support towards integration was seen in the experiences of those Bridges graduates attending college through New York State's Opportunity Programs. As these programs (EOP, HEOP, and SEEK) were designed to give economically disadvantaged and educationally under-served high school graduates a real chance at a college degree, students in these programs had built in supports which helped them not only to navigate the bureaucracies of their colleges but also to establish a community that helped to keep them going. Looking closely at the Opportunity Programs provides insights important to all colleges for their general practices.

The increased persistence and graduation rates among Bridges graduates enrolled through these Opportunity Programs are reflective of program-wide statistics. For HEOP students entering college in 1996-1997, the six-year graduation rate was 51.45% (The State Education Department, 2001), and over 75% of HEOP graduates from the class of 2001 were employed or enrolled in graduate school directly after getting their degree (The State Education Department, 2001);[223,224] for EOP students entering college in 1995

[223] At the time 8.1% of the remaining 48.55% HEOP students were still enrolled at their colleges and likely to graduate.

the six-year graduation rate was 46.52% (The State University of New York, 2001); and for SEEK, whose population is markedly different from both HEOP and EOP,[225] in 2000 approximately 13% of its students graduated within *four* years (SEEK Annual Report, 2001).[226,227]

These statistics indicate that students enrolled through New York State's Opportunity Programs benefit greatly from their services. Opportunity Programs vary across campuses, but they share a host of common practices: summer "bridge" programs to ease students' transition into college, tutoring services, counseling services, stipends for books and basic living expenses, and remedial and developmental education classes. Pre-freshmen summer "bridge" programs, in particular, have a significant impact on Opportunity Program students (Glazer, 1985; The State Education Department, 2001; SEEK Annual Report, 2001). They help students unfamiliar with the culture of college environments start on "equal footing" (Goodwin, 2001; Kezar, 2000) and provide them with a "head start" academically and socially (Bengis, 1986). A variety of activities – that range across campuses but generally include academic classes, study skills workshops, counseling of some form, and campus orientation (Kezar, 2000) – help students begin to make friends, form study groups, foster a connection to their college campuses, and

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[224]At seventeen of the fifty-seven independent colleges in which HEOP exists, the graduation rate of HEOP students exceeded that of the college as a whole (The State Education Department, 2001).

[225] In 2000 the majority of SEEK students had failed at least one of the CUNY assessment tests and therefore were in need of remediation; 32% were over 23 years old; most worked full-time and/or were single parents; and all were commuter students (SEEK Annual Report, 2001).

[226] Using a four year statistic does not do the SEEK program justice, particularly because they do not expect their students to graduate within four years. Given the markedly different population they work with, even using six year graduation rates is an unfair comparison with EOP and HEOP programs.

[227] Research shows that SEEK students, though they have little time to devote to campus life, often become peer counselors, tutors, members of student government and extra-curricular cultural and social clubs (SEEK Annual Report, 2001).

develop confidence in themselves as college students (Bengis, 1986; Francis et al, 1993; Goodwin, 2001; Kezar, 2000; The State Education Department, 2001).[228]

In addition to having many positive effects on individual students, Opportunity Programs have had effects on the overall culture of campuses. Their presence has increased minority enrollment in private schools (Glazer, 1985); led to the development of campus-wide counseling programs (Glazer, 1985); broadened "the culture of university environments sensitizing it to the needs of those whose cultures and codes often differ from middle-class oriented values" (Francis et al, 1993, p. 437); and increased overall administrative and faculty support for the students Opportunity Programs serve (Glazer, 1985).

Despite their success, Opportunity Programs remain too limited in the number of students they serve and continually vulnerable to shrinkage due to a lack of funding. Housed within administrative offices on campus that are distinctly separate from all other academic departments and programs, Opportunity Programs are funded primarily through the State Education department. With on-going budget cuts to higher education at both the State and Federal levels, the sustainability and growth of New York State's Opportunity Programs are a continual issue (Glazer, 1985; SEEK Annual Report, 2001; Crull, 1987; Francis et al,1993). As noted in Chapter 5, at one State school I visited the financial aid counselor reserved for the EOP program had already been moved out of it and into the college's financial services office. A graduate herself of the EOP program at the college, she expressed outrage over the effects budget cuts were having, and would

[228] Because the pre-freshmen summer program was not required of all SEEK students at one point, comparisons reveal the impact. 96% of SEEK students who attended the summer program registered for classes in the fall while only 57% of those who did not attend the summer program registered (Bengis, 1986). Furthermore, GPAs of students who attended the summer programs were higher than those who do not (Bengis, 1986).

continue to have. She explained that while there were usually 600-650 EOP students at her college, the EOP program was told the population must be cut to 500 for the upcoming year – which translated to admitting 40-70 students rather than 120. Furthermore, though the program had already reduced their summer "bridge" program from six weeks to four-and-half weeks, it was told to further cut services given the new budget constraints.

It is astonishing that a program statistically proven to address the "achievement gap" in higher education is being continually cut back.[229] The same politicians in Washington who call for greater accountability on the part of institutions of higher education with regard to graduation rates (Committee of Education and the Workforce, 2003), are the ones who have effectively cut funds for programs like these through cuts in federal aid to both college students and institutions of higher education (Gladieux, 2004). Until such trends are reversed, policy makers' attempts to address the achievement gap in higher education will remain nothing more than window-dressing. Opportunity Programs, and ones like it in other states, not only need to be expanded, they need to be used to inform the general practices of all colleges.

The Adjustments: Financing Higher Education

The Issues

Regarding to the costs of higher education, the implications are simple and yet likely the most difficult to change. Trends in college costs and financial aid need radical reform to better reflect the goals of the Higher Education Act of 1965 which intended to make college an affordable option for *all* students. In the immediate years following the

[229] As noted in earlier, pre-college programs like Upward Bound and Trio programs, that also have proven to be effective in bringing more low-income students of color to college are also being cut back because of federal budget cuts.

Act's inception, through the creation of need-based grants, there was a significant narrowing of the gap between high and low income students going to college (Mortenson, 1990).[230] Unfortunately, this gap has begun to grow wider with recent policy shifts. While in 1980-1981 55% of financial aid was in the form of grants and 43% in the form of loans, in 2000-2001 41% was in the form of grants and 58% in the form of loans (Swail et al, 2003). Student debt has risen more than 50% since 1996, with graduates of public colleges carrying a median of $16,000 in debt, and graduates of private colleges a median of $20,000 (Pew Charitable Trusts in Gertner, 2006). Since 1990 the number of merit-based grants grew by 206% while need-based ones grew only 41% (Swail et al, 2003). Moreover, in 1992 the federal government shifted away from subsidized loans towards unsubsidized ones, and by 1998 one-third of student loans were unsubsidized (Fossey, 1998). Finally, in 2002 alone almost every state raised tuition and fees at public universities, some by 20% or more (Winter & Medina, 2003). The results: thousands of qualified low-income students are not pursuing college because of seemingly prohibitive costs (Burd, 2002); more and more low-income students are turning away from four-year colleges (Cavanagh, 2002; McPherson & Schapiro, 1999); and/or, as seen in the experiences of Bridges graduates, many are stopping-out for financial reasons – of those surveyed, 52% of Bridges graduates who had stopped-out of college said that financial issues factored prominently into their decision.

Recommendations

The bottom line is that current financial aid trends need to be reversed. There are several policy makers and academics who have proposed specific recommendations to

[230] In 1979 the gap between low-income and high-income students attending college was 19.6% (Mortenson, 1990, p.i).

the federal government, state governments, and institutions regarding college aid (see Gertner, 2006; Gladieux, 2004; Kane, 1999; McPherson & Schapiro, 1999). Overall, their recommendations emphasize the importance of making aid need-based and reducing overall costs of college-going to low-income families. In a recent New York Times Magazine article several specific suggestions were made with regard to making loans more manageable for students, most notably: loan forgiveness for students entering fields like teaching and public service and income-contingent loan-repayment whereby students pay a percentage of their income to their loans – thus, until they are able to get a job, they are not burdened and their payments are commensurate with their salary. In essence, what is being recognized more and more by policy makers, scholars, and foundations is that, when financial barriers are removed students persist at higher rates through college and are far higher achievers (Gertner, 2006).

Conclusions

Reproduction and Resistance: Reaching for Possibility through Institutional Agency

> *"If education is not the key to social transformation, neither is it simply meant to reproduce the dominant ideology."* – Paolo Freire (1998, p.110)

The post-secondary journeys of Bridges graduates speak directly to both the power and the limits of small school reform and more largely to the role of schools in mediating inequality. Without the interventions Bridges provides many students who attended the school might never have graduated high school, let alone begun college. Moreover, Bridges graduates had not only the aspirations but also the abilities and will to go on to college. Not one student was told they were not "college material," encouraged to join the military, or provided an academic course of study that was not college-preparatory. At the same time, as Bridges graduates tried to continue to beat the odds in their post-

secondary experiences, those odds only seemed to become greater and greater. Unfortunately, faith in democratic promise, and even actions on the part of schools that move us closer to that promise, will never be enough to achieve social justice unless the landscape outside school walls, and specifically those conditions further confining opportunities for low-income people of color in America, is changed.

The debate over the roles schools can play in changing society versus the ways in which society needs to change for schools to effectively do their job is age-old. John Dewey, whose vision of education was directly aligned with his vision of democracy, argued that radical changes in the conditions of people required radical changes in education (Dewey, 1930). George S. Counts, encapsulating a critique of Dewey and other progressive educators, credited them for placing experience at the center of learning, focusing attention on the student, and championing the rights of children, but exclaimed this was not enough. "The weakness of Progressive Education," Counts (1932) wrote, "thus lies in the fact that it has elaborated no theory of social welfare, unless it be that of anarchy or extreme individualism." (p. 5)

Social class and institutional racism do exert tremendous power over the trajectories of low-income students of color, and while schools alone will never be able to *overcome* these factors completely, they *do* have a clear role to play in mediating them. As the debate continues over the role of schools in these struggles, the resolution is clear: schools indeed have power to resist the status quo but that power exists within a "limit situation" (Freire, 2002; Martin-Baro, 1994) – a situation within which oppressed people can consider ways to act on constraints to their freedom in order to expand the possibility of greater freedom (Freire, 2002). As Noguera (2003) argued, "If we apply Freire's

approach to understanding the limit situations that confront urban schools, there is a greater likelihood that we can devise creative approaches that make it possible to move beyond the dismal status quo." (p.17)

If Niki, Wesley, Charles, Teresa, Maria, Malik and other Bridges graduates had attended a comprehensive public high school in New York City, would their trajectories have been different? It is not possible to really know, but statistics indicate that without the work of Bridges many of these same graduates would not have begun college and far fewer would have completed as much as they did, up to and including attaining a degree. For those who did receive Bachelors or Associates degrees they had at least the pre-requisite for social mobility, even if its value is not as great as it once was. And for those who completed only some college, while they may have been left with the burden of debt, they were left with something else. As the principal of Bridges, in reflecting on one student who stopped-out of college, explained,

> This student came to us as a special [education] student…He was told he shouldn't be in a regular school. He worked hard. He had incredible teachers. And he just made it…His GPA was maybe a 2.2 or 2.1. His SAT scores were horrible. He got into college…and he went for a year. He didn't fail out of college. He was taught in high school to access resources…he got the money ... filled out the forms ...was able to follow through with everything to go away to college. Got there and enjoyed it, to some degree…got the resources he needed, advocated for himself enough to be able to stay afloat and have the option to go back to school next year. For reasons partly to do with money he decided to come back to New York and work for a little while and then go back to school…So he comes back and he gets a job that pays bills…and he can support himself... This student had the confidence to go away to college. He had the confidence to access resources. He had the confidence to come back home. He had the confidence to go out and get a job… Because, I think, we prepared this kid well… He learned…he took the risk. I think having him go away to college and taking that step and realizing it wasn't for him and knowing that he could go to college and that he didn't fail out of college but he chose to leave college for whatever reason, was important for this kid. If you look at him as a statistic you could say, 'oh, here's another kid who dropped out of college.' He's not a kid who dropped out of college. He's a kid who succeeded in high school…He is never going to make a lot of lot of money unless he gets into some business

> venture…But he's going to be able to support himself. He's going to be able to have a family, and he's going to be able to live a lifestyle that is certainly not the same as if he went to college, but certainly, compared to what people thought he might do before he came to Bridges...he's a success case.

The policy of college-for-all was *not* a misguided one for this Bridges graduate – just as it was not for the other 96% who began higher education.

In the name of social justice and equity a primary goal of Bridges, and other small schools, is to prepare all students for the option of college. Beyond obtaining the credentials, however, such schools hold broader goals for their students. One teacher commented that Bridges aims to teach students to "be critical thinkers and to not accept everything that's given to them;" a second: "We're trying to provide a good education just because good educations are good for people…it opens doors to opportunities and allows you to read newspapers, to live in this world and think critically;" a third: "to get students involved with issues of social justice and to take an active part in that;" and a fourth: "I just want them to be in a better position to control their lives." Unfortunately, high schools cannot give students all they need to be in complete control of their lives, but they can help to ease their journeys along the bumpy road ahead. With many schools giving up on low-income students of color and/or focusing their energies on students passing high stakes exams to complete high school – at the expense of preparing them to make the choices life demands and effectively confront the obstacles it presents (Meier, 2002b) – the choices made by small schools like Bridges represent large steps indeed.

The work of schools, on its own, will never be *enough* – it is not as simple as "[giving] them what you have always offered those who have the money to buy the best" (Meier, 2002a, p.49) and expecting that the opportunities will follow. At the same time, schools cannot neglect the power they have by doing nothing because, as the work of

Bridges illustrates, there is tremendous possibility within them. Institutions, just like individuals, can enact agency to confront social reproduction within the United States and ultimately to at least alter the odds. The message: schools can't do it all, but they can, and therefore must, do something.

Determinism without hope is not an option for low-income students of color, nor should it be for schools. Yes, there needs to be more funding for urban schools; yes, there needs to be better social policy for the poor; yes, there need to be fundamental changes within higher education to meet the varying needs of students; yes, there needs to be more collaboration among organizations to build towards a movement for social justice. But while we are waiting – and fighting – for those changes, schools can both ask what they can do in their own buildings to fulfill a commitment to social justice *and* they can act.

Afterward

REFLECTIONS ON A RESEARCHER'S JOURNEY

> *"[The researcher] has a role to play, and he has his own personality that must be met in some degree if he is to function successfully…A real explanation, then, of how the research was done necessarily involves a rather personal account of how the researcher lived during the period of study."* William Whyte (1981, p. 279 in Lareau & Schultz, 1996, p. 9)

Having spent upwards of four years exploring and writing about Bridges, the ideas and practices of its staff, and the post-secondary journeys of Charles, Malik, Maria, Niki, Teresa, Wesley, and countless other Bridges graduates, I believe it is critical for me to explore and write about my own journey over the past four years. Specifically, I want to address a series of questions: What led me to this topic of research, and what ideas did I carry with me about it? How did the process of doing the research challenge my preconceived notions, and what dilemmas arose throughout the research process? And finally, what effects did conducting this study have on me both as a researcher and as an educator?

This *Afterward* explores these very questions, to provide insight not only into the resulting analyses and implications I have presented, but also to lend voice to a body of literature that speaks to the importance of understanding the way research is done and the tensions and "muddles" (Eisenhart, 2001) that emerge (see Fine, 1994b; Lareau & Schultz, 1996). Furthermore, while researchers may try to separate themselves out from their studies, it is never possible to completely do so – particularly when research is ethnographic. Therefore, it is critical to explore the ways in which a researcher's positionality influences the course of her work and then to find a space to write oneself into the text. As Susan Kreiger argued,

> [O]ur analyses of others result from highly interactional processes in which we are personally involved. We bring biases and more than biases. We bring idiosyncratic patterns of recognition. We are not, in fact, ever capable of achieving the 'distance' we have long been schooled to seek. While recognition of the interactional and contextual nature of social research is not new, how we interpret ourselves during this new period of self-examination may, in fact, add something fresh and significant to the development of sophistication in social science. (Kreiger in Lareau & Schultz, 1996, pp. 180-181)

I include this analysis as an *Afterward* as opposed to lacing my own experiences throughout the text because in the end the story being told *is* about Bridges, its graduates, and small schools attempting to work towards social justice – *not* about me as a researcher. Ethnographic research provides readers with an important opportunity to view a phenomenon for themselves, through presenting experiences and voices as holistically as possible, and thus allowing readers to draw conclusions for themselves. My experiences and demographic background inevitably influenced how I shaped the study, proceeded with the research, chose which scenes to depict and which voices to present, and ultimately shaped the conclusions I drew. As such, it is important that readers have access to as much of the whole picture of my experiences as possible as they draw their own conclusions about the power and limits of small school reform.

Beginning the Journey

I formally began my research study in the Spring of 2002, however I had begun to generate an interest in the topic and a series of related questions long before this. As a teacher at Bridges, I started to think about how well prepared graduates were for higher education – and what being "prepared" actually meant – before the first cohort of students had even graduated high school. Essentially, believing it was our job to prepare students for college, I often found myself wondering how well I, and the school as a whole, were doing with this mission.

Only two years out of college myself when I began teaching high school, I believed I had a pretty good idea of what being prepared for higher education meant, at least with regard to academics, and I used that understanding to guide my teaching. My first year, as a 9th grade humanities teacher, my planning partner and I – both white, middle class, recent college graduates of "most competitive" liberal arts colleges – spent hours discussing and planning curriculum: What sources should we use – Castro's "History Will Absolve Me," Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies*? How would we help students to understand complicated texts that were well above many of their reading levels? What structures could we develop that would help them to organize their ideas for writing and then revising their papers? How could we structure a debate on the future political status of Puerto Rico to ensure all students would speak? Were we asking students to question sources and develop their own ideas?

At the same time, I found myself worrying more often than not about my students' skills and worked furiously to catch them up to speed so they could ultimately make it in higher education. I stayed at school late to help students with their assignments, put in enormous amounts of time to give them written feedback detailing how they could improve their work, and talked with many of their families on a regular basis to both inform them of their children's performance and strategize how to best help them. When I began teaching 11th and 12th grades, I found myself impressing upon my students regularly that they needed to work hard to be ready for college: their work habits would have to be better in college – professors would not accept late papers; they needed to be ready for heavy reading loads – they would be expected to read a book a week for some

classes; they would have to write long papers – sometimes as long as 20 pages. From conversations with colleagues and the company I kept in the building in those after school hours, it was clear I was not alone in the amount of time I spent both working and worrying.

Despite such concerns, along with my colleagues, I always assumed students would go to college and did what I could to encourage them to do so. In advisory I had students explore college guide books; I arranged one or two college visits annually; I scheduled time for all of my students to meet with the college counselor; I urged students to take the free Princeton Review SAT course the school offered, impressing upon them the importance of the test for college admissions and even kept lists of who attended and who did not, calling students' homes to talk to their parents about the importance of the class.

When it came time for applying to college, many students came to me for advice – and to those that didn't I might well have offered my advice anyway. Unaware of many of the issues my students were thinking about when it came to deciding where to apply and ultimately where to go, I again worked off of my own college experiences, as a White woman who attended an Ivy League university without financial aid. I said things like: *Go away– college is a great experience. College is the best four years of your life. Don't worry about money right now – apply and see what packages you get – the college counselor can help you get the scholarships you need to pay for college. Don't worry now if you are unsure what you want to study – that is what college is for, figuring it out.* I knew my life was different was my students', but I was not aware of the depths of those differences and ultimately of the ways in which they shaped anticipations and experiences.

There were a few key moments that helped me begin to challenge my assumptions around college and to become more aware of the ways in which race, ethnicity and class shape the college-going experience. At the same time, I was not clear about what to do with these wake-up calls; how to consider them in my approach to college preparation and advising; or how to help my students sort through their own concerns about college.

> *Moment One*: After an advisory where students filled out college applications, two young women stayed behind to talk with me. Jasmine was not sure whether she should apply to colleges outside of the city. "I can't leave my mother. Nothing in the house will get done. No one will change the light bulb or do the laundry if I'm not there." Lydia responded, "I understand that feeling but you have to do it for yourself. They will manage without you." Jasmine began to cry– she told us that she was worried because when her father gets drunk he can be abusive towards her mother, and she was the only one in the house who stopped this. I remained quiet.
>
> *Moment Two*: Juan came to me with a dilemma: he had been accepted to Wesleyan and Hunter and was unsure of which to attend. He was interested in Hunter; it had a strong Puerto Rican studies program and he could stay at home. But then Wesleyan was offering him a lot of money, and he knew, mostly from his teachers, that it was a prestigious school. At the same time, he worried about whether he could manage the work and if he would feel comfortable with the other students. As a student who was not engaged in his studies before 10th grade, and struggled with learning disabilities, I was worried about his academic preparation as well. But Wesleyan offered him a spot and the money – I should tell him to try it, right? If he didn't like it he could always transfer to Hunter. I turned to a colleague from another school who worked with seniors for insight. "You have to tell him to go to Wesleyan," he advised. Juan went to Wesleyan, along with one classmate from Bridges. They called me the first week to tell me they were the only two students of color from public schools in the entire freshmen class.
>
> *Moment Three*: Anthony was not completing his college applications, despite saying that he wanted to go to college. At a parent-teacher conference, after reviewing Anthony's report card, I raised the question of college. Did he want to go? He began to show ambivalence. His mother began to talk, beginning with the message that she wanted Anthony to go to college, but then she began to cry. Having never been to a college before she wanted to know what would happen if he got sick. Was there an infirmary there? How would he come home? Over Anthony's spring break, I took him and his mother to visit SUNY Old Westbury on Long Island. Both Anthony's and his mother's eyes and smiles were wide throughout the visit. As we drove away from campus Anthony's mother exclaimed, "I wish *I* could go there!" The following fall Anthony's mother said good-bye as he headed to begin his college journey at SUNY Old Westbury.

There were also the sobering moments when graduates returned to visit. The majority had planned on attending college when they left high school. Most of them began; several were still attending; some had transferred; and far too many, from my perspective, had left. What was this about? Had we prepared them academically? Were they leaving because they could not handle the work? What could we do differently to help them? Should we be giving more lectures and tests if that's what they struggled most with in college? Many said they left for financial reasons – was this true? Was this the whole story?

As a teacher committed to college preparation for all students, I continued to work intensively to develop curriculum that would challenge students, to stay after school helping them one-on-one, to follow up with them to make sure they were completing their work, and to counsel them about college in the only way I knew how. Towards the end of the school year in 2001, my last year of teaching before attending graduate school, my questioning about college had reached a point of urgency. Directly after taking the 11th grade on a full day trip to visit Sarah Lawrence College and SUNY New Paltz, I stayed at school late to write a memo to the principal and assistant principal explaining what I thought to be the problem and providing some recommendations for the following year. An excerpt of the memo follows:

> June 2, 2001
> Having just returned from a trip to two different colleges, I am thinking a lot about what we have been able to give students at [our school] and what we have not been able to give them in terms of preparation for the college process. If we say we are a college prep school – which we are – this means more than preparing college prep curriculum. Our students do not know nearly enough about the college process and the only place most of them get exposed to any information about it is in school. We need to begin their education much earlier in regards to this and we need to be

more organized and proactive regarding the steps taken in applying to college. There are a few key concerns I have:

1) Students know very little about the different types of colleges that exist – they are not made aware of differences between 2 and 4 year schools, liberal arts vs. specialized schools, programs available, etc.
2) The current junior class had not visited ONE college until June 2nd, 2001.
3) Several juniors were unable to take their SATs this year because by the time we got Princeton Review squared away, the earliest date to take the test was June. We, advisors, were given applications for the test the day before they were due. Several students did not get tickets and had to pay $30 to go stand-by and many of those students arrived to find out there was no space for them. Other students did not have photo ID when they arrived – though they had birth certificates and social security cards – they were unable to take the test. The next test is in October.
4) Those students applying to competitive schools that require SAT IIs have not planned for these tests.
5) We have not made 2-year colleges enough of a topic of discussion within the school.
6) Many students are graduating and not succeeding in college – sometimes due to snafus with financial aid, sometimes because of GPAs, and sometimes because the transition to the school they have gone to is simply too difficult. I think this is partly a problem of poor advisement.

My thinking about college had clearly moved forward in my seven years of teaching; but I had many more questions than answers, a still too-narrow understanding of higher education, and unexplored assumptions about the power of a high school in preparing students for life beyond the 12th grade.

The Journey

The journey of conducting this study was marked by many new insights, not only into college-going in the United States for low-income students of color, but also into conducting research. Dilemmas and realizations arose throughout the research and analysis process, among them: the importance of looking across settings, the difficulty of making decisions about what to include about individual research participants' lives, the struggle to critique small schools without making them even more vulnerable than they already are, decisions about whether to analyze and write across graduates' experiences

or within them, and the importance of doing longitudinal research.[231] In this section I will focus on two other issues which were particularly poignant to me throughout this study: 1) the effects of participant observation on my understandings of both the experiences of graduates and the larger landscape of higher education; 2) the decisions I had to make around intervention with the graduates, and in particular with Charles, Malik, Maria, Niki, Teresa, and Wesley.

The Importance of Participant Observation

Time and again throughout this study, I was reminded of why it is so critical when doing research to not only listen to the words of research participants, but to also view participants within their own settings. Often my visits to graduates on college campuses revealed more to me about their experiences than many interviews combined did, as the following examples illustrate. When I asked Wesley to take me to places where he spent a lot of time on the campus of his private college, our first stop was the financial aid office; when I asked Charles to take me to places where he spent time on his predominantly White and middle-class urban campus, he had nowhere to take me –

[231] Though the importance of longitudinal research will not be a focus of this section, I want to offer one important example of why doing longitudinal research, especially around persistence through higher education, is particularly important. Research studies that track high school graduates one, or even two, years out of high school miss a tremendous amount of fluctuation that happens within their experiences, and it becomes too easy to attribute decisions to leave college to more simplistic reasons than the full scope of reasons at play. For example, when Malik decided to leave his college, if he had been interviewed only once – or just surveyed – he would have said he left college for financial reasons. He did, in that when tuition went up – and his grant-based aid did not – he chose to leave. At the same time, having interviewed him several times over the course of his first year of college I knew that Malik was particularly frustrated with both the pedagogy and the social life at his college. He had stressed over and over in that first year that he was not learning much and was frustrated with the general campus culture. Having followed Malik over time, I was able to develop a more informed analysis of why he left college at the beginning of his second year out of high school. Niki presents another important example. She had successfully advocated for more grant-based aid when tuition went up after her first year at her private college. When she attempted the same after tuition went up again at the end of her second year of college, however, she was not met with the same response. In the end, while a positive help-seeking orientation and developed social capital helped Niki to beat the odds after her first year, the political economy of higher education proved to be too powerful after her second year.

telling me he fled home right after class. When I visited Niki, she was panicked because she had to turn in a final paper and her printer was broken; Ava went to the library to print out the paper for her and delivered it to her class so it would not be late. When I toured a college with Malik, I observed his excitement at the thought of transferring to the school particularly as he interacted with professors over lunch, asked questions, and even participated in a class he visited. When I visited Teresa at her community college, she showed me the library where you could sign up for only one-hour time slots on the computers – if you were not done with your paper in that time, you could go to another room where there were computers and sign up for another one-hour time slot. These experiences provided me with tangible examples of the ways in which the obstacles faced by Bridges graduates in college, and their reactions to them, played out in their day to day lives.

Looking comprehensively at one experience I had when visiting Maria at her small "most competitive" private college in Connecticut illustrates how much a comprehensive visit within the context of a go-along (Kusenbach, 2003) can reveal.

Visiting Maria

Maria called me at the beginning of her first year of college to tell me how she was doing. With enthusiasm, she talked about her classes, her big sister on campus, and the friends she had made through the volleyball team and her dorm. She added that she was upset because she was kicked off of the volleyball team for having missed too many practices. Just two days later she sent an email:

> I get along with my roommates very well. I think we are the most diverse room on campus. Four people, one white girl from CT – but she can be ghetto, lol[232] – one black girl from Nigeria, but she lives in Bronx, New York – one girl from Nepal –

[232] Lol means "laugh out loud" in instant-messaging short-hand.

> and then there is me, the Puerto Rican from Manhattan….The college actually isn't all that bad. I am understanding things very well in my classes, I am holding down three jobs – two in dining services and the other in the Admissions office. I am doing my community service at the [college's] children's school…I was on the volleyball team but since I had such a busy schedule the coach talked with me and figured it would be better if I hung out for this year and came back next year.

Other than the issue regarding the volleyball team, I expected things to be going well when I went to visit Maria in mid-October. When I arrived, however, I a saw a different experience than she had narrated through email, over the phone, and even in the on-campus formal interview we had.

Having confirmed my visit with Maria the previous day and told her I would begin by observing her first period class, I was surprised to find she had a full-period exam in that first class. Why hadn't Maria mentioned this? I spoke with her professor outside of the class during the exam (the school works on an honor-system), and she made it clear that Maria had studied for the test – at least the night before – as she and another classmate called the professor at her home with questions. However, the professor also noted that while Maria was attentive when she came to class and always sat in the front row, she had recently missed several classes and the review session due to illness. When Maria and I proceeded to her next class, we sat in an empty room for upwards of ten minutes before going to the registrar to learn that the class had been cancelled. Having missed the two previous classes because she was sick and having not spoken to any of her classmates, Maria was unaware that the professor had announced he would be at a conference.

When I asked Maria to take me on a tour of the campus to the places she spent time, the first stop was the lounge in her dorm where there was a TV with cable; having no cable at her apartment in New York City she guided me with excitement through the

many channels on the TV. The second and last stop on the tour was her dorm room. When I asked about where she usually had lunch, Maria told me she almost always ordered Chinese food into her room and ate alone – so that is what we did for lunch. She showed me the stack of cash she had been collecting from her jobs, which she used to pay for the Chinese food.

After lunch Maria had to go to one of her jobs – the one in the school cafeteria. On route, she spoke in Spanish with the janitor who cleaned her dorm and introduced me to the cafeteria workers at her job, but she did not stop to say hello or to introduce me to any students on campus. When we walked past the college green where many students were hanging out, she made a point of telling me she never did that. When Maria met me after her job, she was carrying four ice cream bars, two hot chocolates, and a brownie – all of which she got for free while working. She explained she usually stocks up on food from there so she does not have to pay for as much out of pocket or use up her meal plan.

In our interview Maria did reveal more about the ups and downs of her life at college, telling me about a series of overt racist incidents that had taken place on campus, about staying up late to complete work given her busy schedule, and about getting sick a lot of the time. However, she contended throughout the hour-and-a-half interview that she was “comfortable” on campus and managing her course work with relative ease.

My visit to Maria gave me an important window into the factors underlying her subsequent dismissal from college, one which her interviews alone did not. On that visit to her campus, it was clear that: Maria felt less comfortable than she admitted on her predominately White campus as illustrated by the amount of time she spent alone and/or in her dorm room; she was not managing her course load with ease, but rather getting

sick from staying up late to complete her assignments and thus missing classes; and she was having a particularly hard time managing her "free time," particularly in the face of free access to cable and the opportunity to make, and save, money through on-campus jobs. Without using go-alongs (Kusenbach, 2003) as a part of my methodology I would have been left with only Maria's narrations of her experiences which would have explained part, but not all, of the story.

To Intervene or Not to Intervene

I have been asked many times throughout my research process about whether and how much I intervened to help graduates, particularly those who I followed in the longitudinal study. In the beginning of the study, this was a particularly difficult issue for me. On the one hand, I had been a teacher longer than I had been a researcher, and specifically a teacher to some of these very students several years prior; thus my inclination was to act as a mentor and guide. On the other hand, for the purposes of maintaining distance within the research, understanding what happened in graduates' journeys through higher education, and calculating trends around persistence and completion, many internal voices told me not to intervene. The solution, for me, was that I had to find a balance between the two, and so I did this in several ways: I did not offer unsolicited advice to graduates about the decisions they made or dilemmas they faced; when graduates came to me for advice I used what they had said throughout the course of our research together to guide the advice I did give; when graduates came to me for feedback on academic work, I provided it and at the same time encouraged them to seek out help from tutors and academic support services on their campuses; I kept records of those phone calls graduates initiated themselves and the times they asked for help with

things like transferring and job searches; and I conducted a phone survey, which did not include the graduates I followed, to ascertain trends in persistence and completion.

The issue of financial assistance and using my own connections for graduates was particularly challenging. When graduates told me of financial issues, related to everything from Xeroxing fees to paying for books to receiving transcripts to paying for tuition increases, there was always the question of how much to help. Should I use my contacts – or my own funds – to ease the way with some of the costs? I had several thoughts and feelings about this: I was disturbed and incensed by the injustice of the intense financial strains my participants were under and the limited institutional help they received; I believed that in doing research *with* my participants towards social justice it was wrong to sit back and do nothing when I could possibly do something; and, at the same time, not only could I not help in every instance, I did not believe I should.

My solution was that students would continue to receive the stipends they had gotten their first year for participating in the project. In fact, they often turned to me for the money – when in need of something – before I had awarded it: Malik needed money to pay the balance of his first college's bill to have his transcripts released; Charles needed money for a one-way airplane ticket from Florida to New York to petition to return to his college and visit others; Niki needed money to pay for her books; Teresa needed money to pay off a phone bill to prevent her phone from being disconnected. I did not, however, take the initiative in all cases. For example, I could have tried to help Niki secure private funding to cover the $2,000 tuition increase between her second and third years of college, but I did not. I considered it for a moment, questioning what I would have done if I were not in a research relationship with her, but concluded that – because

this was a trend for many of the graduates with whom I was conducting research – it was not possible to help them *all* in this way and was therefore unfair to do just for Niki.

I did use my own contacts to help the graduates with other things that were not directly financial, connecting them to opportunities they otherwise would not have had and providing them with feedback and assistance when they asked. For example, I used contacts I had at colleges to schedule visits for Malik and Charles; when friends contacted me – or I heard of opportunities – that were work-related, I put the graduates in touch with them; when graduates wanted to transfer, I put them in touch with the new college counselor at Bridges to help with details of applying for aid and completing applications; and when graduates asked me to read transfer applications or review resumes I did.

My overall conclusion on the issue of intervention was that when a researcher is engaged in research towards social justice, they cannot be passive in the face of the needs of the participants with whom they are working. Following the same logic, but within a different sphere, was the question of how much to intervene at Bridges. When teachers opened their classrooms to me for observation, they often asked if they could have feedback based on my observations. I always made a follow-up time to do this – again if they asked, which was almost always – as it was clear that this was one way I could give back to the school. Furthermore, at the end of years two and three of my research, I did a formal presentation to the whole staff at Bridges and had individual meetings with the college counselor and principal. This was not only one way to thank the school for opening its doors to me; it was also a way to *use* the research I had been doing towards whole-school change.

In the end, intervention was a part of the research process, though a conscious part that was understood as intervention. Schools and communities – particularly ones which are underserved – have developed a healthy skepticism of researchers who *observe* their lives and their work, often making judgments about them. Research is not a process that should be done *on* – or, as Fine (2004b) argues, that "Others" – but rather one that should be done *with* a community. The importance of doing research with and writing about underserved communities in ways that interrupt such "Othering" cannot be over-emphasized. Fine (1994b) writes,

> [Q]ualitative researchers have begun to interrupt Othering… Emerging in some spaces is this cadre of qualitative researchers who see their work with those who have been cut out as Others, on struggles of social injustice, in ways that disrupt Othering, and provoke a sense of possibility. (p. 79)

The Aftermath

I began this study with a belief in the power of small schools and an admiration for the tremendous work they do towards making education for under-served student populations a positive, rigorous, enriching and just experience. I emerge with the same belief and admiration, but these feelings have been tempered greatly by what I have come to understand about the difficulty of the mission of small schools and the other forces at play. As someone who has remained active in practice-based work since beginning this study, I have simultaneously lived the realities of what it means to develop and sustain the work of small schools – and work towards the goal of the possibility of college for all – and observed first-hand the obstacles small schools graduates face as they move through higher education.

I recently attended a celebration of and fundraiser for the work of one new small school, begun in 2004, where I worked for a year doing professional development. At the

event, 10th grade students (the school's oldest grade) spoke about being engaged in their learning in ways they had never been before, the importance of the trusting relationships they had developed with their teachers, and their appreciation of the school for pushing them academically to do more than they ever thought they could do. One student reflected on the significance of having one of her teachers call her mother upon learning the student had not planned to attend a trip to a private competitive college. While her teacher thought this particular college could very well be a good option for her, the student had never imagined college would be in her future and so had discounted the trip.

A teacher spoke next. She highlighted how invigorating it was to work at a school with such a committed staff, where there was such a strong belief about what young people could accomplish, and such a clear respect for the work of educators – particularly in light of the fact that they continued to work in such an under-resourced space with such limited funds. She noted that teachers often went into their own pockets to purchase supplies, applied for grants to fund educational trips and events, and even cited one teacher who brought a group of students to a political summit meeting in Boston and had them stay with his own family because they could not afford to go any other way.

Lastly the principal spoke, emphasizing how proud she was of both students and staff, describing the inquiry-based work many were engaged in, providing examples of the ways in which students were learning to take action when they saw things in their communities that were unjust. She made an appeal to friends of the school to donate what they could to help. Around the room were tables outlining the school's needs in different areas: social work and guidance – the need for more support services for students; college exploration – the need for funds for SAT classes and college trips; political action

opportunities for students – the need for money to help student political action groups to travel to summits, rallies, and other events; science – the need for supplies to improve the school's laboratories and overall science program. The principal ended by projecting two years ahead, letting families and supporters of the school know that all the school's graduates would not only be attending college, they would be attending the country's best colleges and would be prepared to overcome the obstacles that might come their way.

I stood amidst the cheers and claps and thought about these promises, and, perhaps unlike most others in the room, I thought even more about the struggles I knew this school and these students would face in realizing these promises. It was not that I thought the goal of college should not be held up, it was that I shuddered when I thought about how simple and achievable it sounded and how much more complicated it is to realize. There were two sets of voices in my head. One set consisted of the cynical, or realistic, ones. They spoke about, among other things: the numbers of students who would not get the financial aid they needed to get through college in the face of rising tuition costs; the students who would not find what they were looking for at their college and stop-out with the intention of returning only to discover just how difficult that would be; the numbers of students who would turn to for-profit schools and end up with large debts and degrees that reaped few benefits; the students who would feel so intimidated by the professors and other students at their college that they would shut down; and the difficulties and limitations presented by a political economy that would continually present roadblocks as students moved through college and that would make those who graduated college question the value of their hard-earned degree. The other set of voices were ones of excitement and possibility; they were inspired by the fact that there are schools willing to

work hard, despite the odds, to get as close to that dream as possible by mediating those odds for as many as possible.

The first set of voices will not go away, and I have come to embrace their presence. It is those voices that move me, and hopefully others, to join and form movements and efforts that extend beyond high school reform. At the same time, it is the latter set of voices that move me to continue to work within small urban public schools that are dedicated to doing what they can in the struggle. It is those voices that led to my work with small schools around the high school to college transition through the Institute for Urban Education at Eugene Lang College The New School. As I sit with groups of educators who not only want to learn and understand more about what their students will face in the high school to college transition, but who also want to figure out how to better structure their schools and practice to prepare them for it, I am reminded of the power of such schools. Without them, many young people – not unlike Charles, Malik, Maria, Niki, Teresa, and Wesley – would either give up hope and stop trying or would hold onto the American dream but be equipped with little that would allow them to achieve it.

Where I emerge in the end of the study is holding on to both sets of voices and realizing that it is only when you hold on to *both* that you can begin to imagine a world where the Charles', Malik's, Maria's, Niki's, Teresa's, and Wesley's are all given what they need to achieve the dreams of small schools, and more pointedly, their own.

APPENDIX A

Ethnographic School-Based Study: Staff Members Interviewed and Spaces Observed

Staff Members Interviewed

- 9th grade math teacher – two years at Bridges (five years teaching) – White
- 10th grade humanities teacher – two years at Bridges (seven years teaching) – African American
- 10th grade math teacher – eight years at Bridges – White
- 10th grade science teacher – nine years at Bridges – White
- 11th grade science teacher – four years at Bridges – Caribbean American
- 11th grade humanities teacher – eight years at Bridges (nine years teaching) – White
- 12th grade literature teacher – six years at Bridges (eleven years teaching) – White
- College Advisor – five years at Bridges (three years as classroom teacher and two as college advisor) – Latino
- Principal – eight years at Bridges (two years as principal – nine years teaching) – White
- Founding principal – nine years principal of Bridges (five years teaching) – White

Spaces Observed (note: some classrooms were observed on several different occasions)

Classrooms	Student Presentations	Other
9th grade humanities	9th grade math roundtables	Staff meetings (6)
10th grade humanities	9th grade humanities roundtables	Staff Retreat
11th grade humanities	9th grade science roundtables	Principal's Office
12th grade history	10th grade humanities roundtables	Hallways
12th grade literature	12th grade history research paper presentation	Graduation
9th grade math		After School Program (classes, library)
10th grade math		School Advisory Committee Meeting
11th grade math		Anti-Bias Squad Meeting
12th grade economics		
10th grade science		
11th grade science		
11th grade advisory		

APPENDIX B

Longitudinal Ethnographic Graduate Study: Research Process per Graduate

Following are six charts outlining data collection with each participant over the three years. Where there is a month unaccounted for it indicates that there was no contact with any participant that month. Terms within the chart entailed the following:

- "Interview": Interviews were semi-structured (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) and tape recorded; for each interview I also completed a set of field notes directly after meeting with participants. Unless a part of a site visit, interviews took place at Bridges, near participants' homes, or in restaurants/coffee shops.
- "Site visits": graduates taking me on a tour of their college, attending one or two classes, reviewing course syllabi and assignments, and conducting a semi-structured interview with participant; for each site visit I completed a set of typed field notes within a day of the visit.
- "Phone" and "email": initiated at times by me and at other times by the participant. I typed up notes after – or during – each phone conversation and printed all emails. The number in parentheses indicates how many, if there were more than one, in that month. Some calls were brief and others lasted for more than 30 minutes.
- "Transfer Visits": site visits to colleges participants were considering transferring to; I accompanied participants to the sites, toured the college with them, and then interviewed participants' about their reactions to the visits.
- "Writing": participants who, after stopping out of college, reviewed their own interview transcripts and wrote personal statements explaining their own journeys through higher education to date and analyzing why they had stopped-out. This was a technique that I used in hopes of making the research process a transformative experience for participants (Lather, 1986).
- "Presentation": select participants presented on a panel on persistence in higher education at a conference on issues in urban education.
- "Run-In": unplanned, I saw participant and touched base about experiences.

APPENDIX B (continued)

Longitudinal Ethnographic Graduate Study: Research Process per Graduate

2002	June	August	September	October	November	December
Niki	Interview	Parent Interview		Site Visit Interview	Email	
Wesley	Interview	Parent Interview		Email	Site Visit Interview	
Maria	Interview	Parent Interview	Phone Email	Site Visit Interview	Email	
Teresa	Interview	Parent Interview	Phone		Phone	Site Visit Interview
Charles	Interview	Phone		Phone	Site Visit Interview	
Malik[233]			Interview			Interview

2003	January	February	March	April	May	June
Niki		Email (2)	Phone Interview		Email	
Wesley			Interview		Interview	
Maria	Phone Email		Interview		Email (3)	Interview
Teresa		Run-In	Interview		Interview	
Charles	Email (2)	Phone	Email Interview	Email (2)	Interview (2) Email	Email
Malik	Email (2)	Email	Email	Interview		Interview

2003	August	September	October	November[234]	December
Niki	Phone Interview	Site Visit (2) Interview	Phone		
Wesley	Interview		Site Visit Interview		
Maria	Interview				
Teresa	Phone Interview		Site Visit Interview		
Charles	Email (2)	Email	Email	Email (2)	Email
Malik		Phone	Interview		

[233] This participant, for reasons explained in Chapter Five, began college in spring 2003.

[234] Contact with participants was limited in November and December of 2003 primarily because I gave birth to a child. This brief lag in data collection speaks to the complexity of doing an ethnographic longitudinal study as an individual.

APPENDIX B (continued)

Longitudinal Ethnographic Graduate Study: Research Process per Graduate

2004	January	February	March	April	May	June
Niki	Interview		Phone (2)	Phone (2)	Phone Interview	Phone
Wesley	Interview		Phone		Interview	
Maria			Interview Writing	Email Phone		Interview
Teresa		Interview	Phone Interview			Interview
Charles	Phone (3) Email 5	Email (2) Writing	Phone (2) Email (4)	Phone Email	Email (2) Interview Transfer Visit	Run-In Phone
Malik	Phone Interview	Transfer Visit Interview Phone	Phone (2)		Phone Interview	

2004	July	August	September	October	November	December
Niki	Phone	Email	Phone	Site Visit Interview	Email	Presentation
Wesley		Interview				
Maria			Phone	Interview		
Teresa				Run-In Interview		Phone
Charles	Interview Email (2)		Site Visit Interview Email (3)	Email (4)	Interview	Email (4) Interview
Malik			Phone	Site Visit Interview		Presentation Phone

2005	January	February	March	April	May	June/July
Niki					Phone	Interview
Wesley						Interview
Maria		Phone		Phone		
Teresa					Run-In	Interview
Charles	Email	Email	Email	Interview		Interview
Malik		Phone	Phone			Interview

APPENDIX C

Graduates Interviewed for Focus Groups and Individual Interviews

- Focus group and site visit with a group of five graduates of the class of 1999 in their senior year at a "highly competitive" four-year SUNY. 56% of students are White, 18% Asian/Pacific Islander, 5% African American and 7% Latino; 80% persist to graduation. This site visit included an interview with two of the graduates who participated in an EOP program. *March 2003*.

- Focus group with three graduates of the class of 2001 attending a "non-competitive", two-year CUNY – 41% of students are African-American, 31.3% Latino, 11.5% Asian/Pacific Islander, 8.6% White, and 27.2% graduate within six years.[235] *April 2003*.

- Interview with graduate of the class of 1998 who attended a "most competitive" private college in Connecticut and stopped-out. The college is 70% White, 11% African-American, 11% Asian, and 8% Latino; the six-year graduation rate is 90%. *May 2002*.

- Interview and site visit with graduate of the class of 1999 in her senior year at a "most competitive" private college in Connecticut. 72.6% of the students at this college are White, 5.0% Latino, 4.0% African-American, 4.6% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 83% persist to graduation. *March 2003*.

- Interview with a graduate of the class of 2000 who attended a "competitive"[236] four-year SUNY– 84% White, 3% African-American, 2% Latino, 1% Asian, and 59% of students graduate within six years– stopped-out, then attended a "non-selective" two-year CUNY and stopped out again. *March 2003*.

- Interview with a graduate of the class of 2000 who began at a "competitive" four-year CUNY – 40% White, 21% Hispanic, 17% African American, 15% Asian America, and 26.9% of students graduate within six years – left, and then attended a for-profit trade school in New York City. *April 2003*.

[235] This graduation rate includes students who received an Associates degree (20.9%) plus those who also received a Baccalaureate degree (6.3%) within six years.
[236] As this SUNY was not included in Barron's *Profile of American Colleges, 2005* I used the ranking of another SUNY with similar admissions requirements and Freshmen profiles.

APPENDIX C (continued)

Graduates Interviewed for Focus Groups and Individual Interviews

- Interview with graduate of the class of 2002 who attended a non-competitive, two-year CUNY – 41% of students are African-American, 31.3% Latino, 11.5% Asian/Pacific Islander, 8.6% White, and 27.2% graduate within six years[237] - for one year and then stopped-out. *September 2003*.

- Interview and site visit with a graduate of the class of 2002 who attended a post-graduate year at a boarding school in Connecticut and then attended a competitive four-year private college in Massachusetts – 88% White, 3.3% African-American, 2.8% Latino, 2.1% Asian, and 54% persist to graduation. *October 2003*.

- Interview and site visit with a graduate of the class of 2003 attending a private "highly competitive" college in New York City – 77% White, 11% Hispanic, 6.8% African American; 5.8% Asian; 74% persist to graduation. *October 2003*.

[237] This graduation rate includes students who received an Associates degree (20.9%) plus those who also received a Baccalaureate degree (6.3%) within six years.

APPENDIX D

Phone Survey

SCRIPT TO READ FOR PERMISSION:

Records indicate that you graduated from [Bridges] in [YEAR]. I am calling to survey you about your experiences since graduating from high school for a study I am doing. The purpose of the study is to find out more about graduates' experiences since attending [Bridges] and to understand how they were – or were not – prepared for those experiences. All your responses will be kept completely confidential. The phone call will last 10-20 minutes and will be tape recorded with your consent. The survey consists of yes/no questions as well as open-ended questions. Only my advisor, Dr. Michelle Fine, and a professional transcriber and I will have access to this tape. All information gathered will be strictly confidential, and will be stored in a locked file cabinet to which only I will have access. I intend to publish results of the study, but no names of people, identifying characteristics, or names of schools will be used in any of the publications. Do I have your consent to administer a survey and to tape record your responses?

Name of Student: _____

Male/Female

Class of _____

1) What have you been doing since you graduated from high school? I'm going to read you a list of things. If you have done any of these things since graduating say yes.
    a. Had a full time job (other than during the summer) Yes/No
    b. Had a part time job Yes/No
    c. Attended college/school Yes/No
        i. If no, did you plan to attend when you graduated? Yes/No
        ii. If yes, name of college(s)

            _____
        iii. If attended more than one college, how long did you attend each for?

            _____
        iv. Taken remedial classes Yes/No
        v. Been part of opportunity program Yes/No
        vi. Taken time off from college or left. Yes/No
            How long? _____
        vii. Graduated from college Yes/No
    d. Joined the military Yes/No
    e. Become a parent Yes/No
    f. Major? _____

2) What are you doing now?

3) Thinking about your high school experiences, in what ways do you think you developed as a person/student? Is there a particular memory you have of an accomplishment or experience that was significant?

IF student attended college:

4) What did you expect college to be like? In what ways did or didn't it meet your expectations?

5) If you attended college and left, why did you leave? (open ended first) Then -

I'm going to read you a list of reasons people sometimes leave college, if you think a factor was at all a part of your decision to leave say yes – there can be as many as you want from this list.

Financial reasons	Yes/No
Bored by classes	Yes/No
Classes too hard	Yes/No
Work habits (i.e. didn't do my work)	Yes/No
Distracted by social life	Yes/No
Didn't feel like I belonged	Yes/No
Didn't feel like I was as "smart" as other students	Yes/No
Racism/discrimination by other students	Yes/No
Racism/discrimination by professors	Yes/No
Family pressures	Yes/No
Didn't get the help I needed	Yes/No
Didn't feel part of a community	Yes/No
Got involved in too many activities	Yes/No
Too many responsibilities	Yes/No

6) If you did not leave college, were there times when you felt like leaving and if so, what got you through those times – what made you stay?

7) How would you compare your high school and college experiences? How were they similar and different?

8) Are there any skills and/or values that you developed at East Side that helped you in college or skills/values you wish you had when you went to college?

9) How would you describe yourself in terms of race/ethnicity:

African American Caribbean Black Latino South Asian Asian White

6) Were you born in the United States? Yes/No

7) What language is spoken in your home? _____

8) What is the highest level of education your parents/guardians completed?

Mother: middle school GED high school training courses Associates degree Bachelors degree Masters/PhD

Father: middle school GED high school training courses Associates degree Bachelors degree Masters/PhD

9) Is there anyone else you are in touch with who graduated from East Side? Can you give me their contact information?

10) Would you be willing/interested in coming into the school at some point during the year to speak with high school students about your post-high school experiences?

11) Anything to add?

APPENDIX E

Graduation, Persistence, and Stop-Out Rates Across Institutions

Classes of 1999 and 2000 (N=60)

"Most Competitive" or "Highly Competitive" Private Colleges:

- 18% of graduates began at "most competitive" or "highly competitive" colleges
  - 64% of those who began graduated
  - 36% of those who began stopped-out, transferred, or left

"Competitive" or "Less Competitive" Private Colleges:

- 18% of graduates began at "competitive" or "less competitive" private colleges
  - 45% of those who began graduated
  - 55% of those who began stopped-out, transferred, or left

Four-Year State University of New York Colleges:

- 20% of graduates began at four-year SUNYs
  - 75% of those who began graduated
  - 25% stopped-out, transferred, or left

Four-Year City University of New York Colleges:

- 18% of graduates began at four-year CUNYs
  - 18% of graduates who began were still enrolled
  - 82% of graduates who began stopped-out, transferred, or left

Public Colleges not in New York:

- 5% of graduates began at four-year public colleges not in New York
  - 100% of graduates who began stopped-out, transferred, or left

Two-Year City University of New York Colleges:

- 13% of graduates began at two-year CUNYs
  - 25% of graduates who began graduated (Note: These students began at CUNYs that offered 2 and 4 year degrees and they received Associates with plans to continue on to Bachelors.)
  - 12% of graduates who began were still enrolled
  - 63% of graduated who began had stopped-out, transferred, or left

For-Profit Colleges:

- 1 graduate began at a for-profit college and left.

APPENDIX E (continued)

Graduation, Persistence, and Stop-Out Rates Across Institutions

Class of 2001 (N=30)

"Most Competitive" or "Highly Competitive" Private Colleges:

- 2 graduates began at "most competitive" or "highly competitive" private colleges
    - 1 graduate who began was still enrolled and one stopped-out, transferred or left

"Competitive" or "Less Competitive" Private Colleges:

- 23% of graduates began at "competitive" or "less competitive" private colleges
    - 71% of graduates who began were still enrolled
    - 29% of graduates who began had stopped-out, transferred, or left

Four-Year State University of New York Colleges:

- 2 graduates began at four-year SUNYs
    - One graduate was still enrolled and one stopped-out, transferred, or left

Four-Year City University of New York Colleges:

- 2 graduates began at four-year CUNYs
    - Both graduates who began were still enrolled

Public Colleges not in New York:

- 2 graduates began at public colleges not in New York
    - One graduate was still enrolled and one stopped-out, transferred, or left

Two-Year City University of New York Colleges:

- 33% of graduates began at two-year CUNYs
    - 40% of graduates who began were still enrolled
    - 60% of graduates who began stopped-out, transferred, or left

For-Profit Colleges:

- 13% of graduates began at for-profit colleges
    - 50% of those who began had completed certificates or degrees
    - 50% of those who began were still enrolled

APPENDIX E (continued)

Transfer Rates Across Institutions

Transfer Trends

- 32% of all graduates transferred at least once – with some transferring two, three or four times
- 31% transferred into two-year CUNYs
- 31% transferred into for-profit colleges
- 14% transferred into four-year SUNYs
- 14% transferred into four-year CUNYs
- 10% transferred into private colleges
- 3% transferred into two-year SUNYs

APPENDIX F

Declared Majors of Bridges' Graduates

Business/Marketing/Finance (10)
Criminal Justice (9)
Psychology (9)
Computer Related (9)
Sociology (6)
Education (4)
Communications/PR (4)
Accounting (3)
Women's Studies (3)
Liberal Arts (3)
Art/Photography (3)
Hotel/Restaurant Management (2)
Social Work/Human Services (2)
African American Studies
Architecture
Biology
Culinary Arts
Geology
Hispanic Studies
Journalism
Medical Assistant
Nursing
Political Science
Spanish
Theatre
Writing

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