

**Negotiating
Opportunities**
*How the Middle Class
Secures Advantages
in School*

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book is not intended as an evaluation of best practices, the Conclusion does include suggestions for educators, parents, and policymakers. First, I describe how sensitivity to social class differences can help teachers connect with working-class students; recognize their struggles; and support them with assistance, accommodations, and attention. I also discuss the challenges—including large class sizes, intense accountability pressures, and high levels of need—that make it difficult for teachers to assess and respond to students' individual needs. Second, using research on KIPP schools, individualized instruction, and cognitive-behavioral therapy, I argue that although it is possible to teach "middle-class" skills to less privileged students, such efforts are likely to fall short of fully eliminating inequalities, and they might create even more problems than they solve. As this book clearly shows, middle-class families are skilled at securing new resources and teaching their children to do the same. They gain advantages not only by following rules and expectations but also by negotiating changes to and exemptions from them. They also use their power and influence to ensure that schools feel compelled to grant those requests. Thus, even if schools teach working-class students to act like middle-class students, middle-class families will likely find new ways to maintain their negotiated advantages. In terms of solutions, that means that the problem of class-based inequalities has to be tackled (at least in part) at its source—the middle-class families who seek support in excess of what is fair or required and the educators who feel compelled to grant those requests. Convincing middle-class families not to negotiate for extra advantages will almost certainly be an uphill battle. Given those challenges, it will likely be up to educators to deny those requests, and they will likely face backlash in doing so. Without those denials, however, middle-class children will always stay one step ahead.

CHAPTER 1

Coached for the Classroom

For the fifth graders at Maplewood Elementary, Rocket Day was one of the most highly anticipated events of the year. In May, as part of a month-long unit covering both astronomy and the history of space exploration, the students all built and decorated plastic "rockets." On Rocket Day, teachers and parent volunteers set up "launching stations" on the field behind the school. Almost 100 students then paraded outside with their rockets past their parents, who had all been invited to attend. Four at a time, students launched their rockets, chased them approximately 100 yards across the playground, and then ran back to rejoin the line, reload their rockets, and launch again.

A few minutes into the event, Amelia Graham, a working-class, white student whose long bangs brushed the top of her glasses, had just finished her first launch. At the far end of the field, Amelia bent down and picked up her rocket from the ground. She frowned, took a few steps, and then bent down again to retrieve the rocket's parachute, which had landed approximately 10 feet away. The strings connecting the rocket to the parachute had broken during the flight. As Amelia jogged slowly back toward the launching stations, she held the rocket in one hand and the parachute in the other. Rather than rejoin the line, however, Amelia sat down in the grass by herself, approximately 10 yards from where the other students were waiting, close to where the parents were standing to watch. Although there were many parents in attendance, Amelia Graham's parents had to work and could not attend Rocket Day. Her face set tight with concentration, Amelia inspected the broken strings and then began to knot the broken ends back together. Because the strings were so thin and frayed, it took a number of tries to get the knots to

hold. After approximately 10 minutes, having triple knotted each side and tugged the strings to check, Amelia got up from the grass and went to the back of the line.

Meanwhile, Ted Peters, a middle-class, white student wearing nylon track pants and a soccer T-shirt, had just retrieved his rocket and was running back toward the launching stations. Rather than rejoin the line, however, Ted turned and ran toward his mother, who was watching with the other parents on the sidelines:

As Ted approaches, Ms. Peters smiles broadly and praises Ted for a "great flight." Frowning, Ted holds out his rocket and explains that the string attaching the rocket's parachute has broken. After inspecting the broken string, Ms. Peters says encouragingly, "Go ask Mr. Fischer for a new string. I'm sure he'll be able to help." Ted's grim expression brightens. He turns and dashes off to show the broken string to Mr. Fischer, who retrieves an extra string from a supply bin and helps Ted reattach the parachute. The whole exchange takes less than a minute. Ted then immediately rejoins the line to launch his rocket again.

Like Amelia, Ted could have tried to fix the broken string on his own. Instead, Ted turned to his mother for help. Ms. Peters then used that request as a teachable moment, coaching Ted to use Mr. Fischer as a resource to solve the problem for him.

Unlike Ms. Peters, Amelia's parents were not there for Rocket Day—they could not skip work for school events. Despite their absence, however, there is reason to suspect that their voices likely played at least some role in guiding Amelia's actions that day. In third grade, for example, Amelia came home confused about her report card. Amelia had earned an A in math for the marking period, but the teacher also included a comment noting that Amelia "doesn't seem to put enough effort into class." Amelia told her father that the comment "didn't make sense"—she was one of the top-performing students in the class. Amelia's father, however, discouraged Amelia from asking about it because he worried that she might get in trouble for doing so. Even 2 years after that event, Mr. Graham could recall the incident vividly. In an interview during the summer after Amelia's fifth-grade year, Mr. Graham explained,

I told Amelia not to ask about it, cuz the teacher probably wouldn't be too happy. I just want my kids to be respectful and responsible. My kids, I always told 'em. "Look, if you've gotta give somebody a hard time, give it to me. Don't give it to your teachers. Don't give it to other parents." And I've never had a teacher complain. Or, if my kids go and play at somebody else's house, I've never had a parent say: "Your child can't come back." You know? My kids are good for the teachers and for other parents.

Mr. Graham seemed to believe that it was disrespectful for students to complain or bother teachers with requests. Mr. Graham also stressed those views to his children at home. In doing so, he may have prompted Amelia not to ask Mr. Fischer for help with a broken string.

Ultimately, both Ted and Amelia fixed their rockets, but it took Amelia much longer. Furthermore, whereas Amelia went to the back of the line to wait, Ted took his rocket and stepped in behind the friend who had gone before him in the first round. Because of those choices, Ted got to launch his rocket four times, whereas Amelia got to launch hers only twice.

OVERVIEW

The contrast between Ms. Peters' advice and Mr. Graham's advice was part of a larger pattern of social class differences in parental coaching at Maplewood. Specifically, middle-class parents taught their children to manage problems at school using *strategies of influence*. That meant treating teachers as resources, being assertive in making requests for support, and actively avoiding consequences for missteps. Working-class parents, on the other hand, coached their children to manage problems at school using *strategies of deference*. That meant treating teachers with respect, tackling problems on their own, and taking responsibility for their actions.

That class-based coaching also had real consequences for students and for their understanding of how best to manage problems in school. Like Ted and Amelia, students at Maplewood gradually adopted (albeit to varying degrees and with some pushback) their parents' class-based strategies and internalized parents' messages about the importance of using those class-based strategies when managing problems at school. Evidence of that gradual internalization could be seen in interviews conducted after fifth grade, wherein parents and children expressed similar ideas about managing classroom problems and told similar stories about how children's goals, beliefs, and behaviors changed over time. It could also be seen in the fact that social class differences in students' interactions with teachers became more pronounced from third grade to fifth grade.

Of course, such patterns were not perfect. Some parents (including those in upwardly mobile families) were less vigilant than others about teaching class-based strategies, and some children (including shy and high-achieving middle-class children) were less willing and able to follow their parents' lead. Despite those variations, however, parents' class-based coaching still seemed to play a critical role in shaping the class-based patterns of problem-solving that I observed at Maplewood and that I describe in more detail in Chapters 3–5.

COACHING IN CONTEXT

As demonstrated by Jesse and Ellen in the classroom and Ted and Amelia on Rocket Day, the middle-class and working-class children at Maplewood often dealt with problems in contrasting ways. Those patterns were consistent with a larger body of research highlighting social class differences in children's interactions at home (Calarco 2014a; Hart and Risley 1995; Heath 1983; Lareau 2011) and at school (Calarco 2011; Jennings and DiPrete 2010; Lubienski 2000; McLeod and Kaiser 2004; Nelson and Schutz 2007; Streib 2011; Tach and Farkas 2006). Less clear, however, is how children learn to behave in class-based ways.

Scholars of socialization typically imply that those class-based behaviors are a natural and automatic outgrowth of social class differences in children's home lives (Bourdieu 1977; Bronfenbrenner 1958). A number of studies highlight parallels in the class-based skills, beliefs, and values espoused by parents and their children (Heath 2012; Hitlin and Piliavin 2004). Lareau (2011), for example, finds that, like their parents, middle-class children exhibit an "emerging sense of entitlement," whereas working-class children demonstrate an "emerging sense of constraint." Lareau concludes that those differences are likely the product of social class differences in parenting styles. Specifically, she finds that whereas middle-class parents carefully organize their children's lives, encourage them to voice their opinions, and regularly intervene for them when problems arise in school or other institutional settings (see also Chin and Phillips 2004; Cucchiara 2013; Hays 1996; Horvat, Weininger, and Lareau 2003; Nelson 2010; Sui-Chu and Willms 1996), working-class parents instead grant their children ample time for free play, guide their behavior through directives rather than negotiation, and defer to authorities (see also Calarco 2014a; Edwards 2004; Streib 2015).

Scholars of class-based socialization have revealed a number of important findings, but their research is also limited in two key ways. First, the conclusion drawn by many of these scholars—that class-based socialization is an automatic and implicit process—ignores evidence that culture can be passed from parents to children in more active ways (Elder 1974; Pugh 2009; Thorne 1993). We know that parenting is often strategic and goal-oriented.¹ Middle-class parents, for example, intervene for their children at school (Brantlinger 2003; Hays 1996; Lareau 2000; Nelson 2010), and working-class parents try to manage how their families are perceived by others (Edwards 2004). However, because scholars pay little attention to the logics of action that guide child-rearing decisions, it is unclear whether or how parents deliberately try to equip children to manage their own challenges.² Research even suggests that children can

be strategic actors as well. It is known, for example, that children sometimes contest the choices that their parents make about what they should eat or buy or how they should spend their time (Chin and Phillips 2004; Pugh 2009; Zelizer 2002). Less clear, however, is how children respond to ongoing socialization efforts—how they come to accept and utilize the class-based strategies that parents teach them at home. Lareau (2011), for example, does not interview children or observe them without their parents present. Thus, she cannot say how children make sense of the parenting they experience or how they act on those messages when parents are not there to direct them.

Second, existing research has done little to show how class-based socialization contributes to larger patterns of inequality. Certainly, some studies have shown that the class-based behaviors children demonstrate in school are correlated with learning and achievement outcomes (Carneiro and Heckman 2003; Farkas 2003; Heckman and Rubinstein 2001; Heckman, Stixrud, and Urzua 2006). Those studies, however, rarely model the full socialization process, tracing children's classroom behaviors from their origins at home to their consequences at school. Lareau (2011), for example, assumes that social class differences in parenting matter for inequalities, but she does not actually show the profits (or losses) that children get from demonstrating their sense of entitlement or constraint. One notable exception to this trend is Hart and Risley's (1995) study, which links social class differences in parents' language use to children's emerging vocabularies and to their subsequent achievement in school. Hart and Risley cannot state, however, how children actually use their language skills or how they learn to do so from their parents at home.

In summary, social class matters both at home and in the classroom, shaping the parenting that children receive, the behaviors that children demonstrate, and the success that children achieve. Less clear, however, are the mechanisms that produce these patterns and link them to larger inequalities. It is not known, for example, whether the transmission of class cultures is an active process or a passive one. Nor is it known how the lessons that children learn at home ultimately translate into inequalities in school or what role parents, children, and teachers play in that process.

This chapter examines these possibilities. First, I consider how parents teach their children to behave in class-based ways. Next, I explore the extent to which children internalize those lessons. In doing so, I also set the stage for subsequent chapters, which will explore how children activate class-based behaviors in school and how those actions contribute to larger patterns of inequality.

MIDDLE-CLASS PARENTS: COACHING INFLUENCE

The middle-class parenting that I observed was in many ways consistent with patterns found in prior research. Among the middle-class parents at Maplewood, for example, ensuring children's academic success was widely viewed as a primary responsibility of parenting (see also Brantlinger 2003; Lareau 2000, 2011; Nelson 2010). That sense of responsibility also led middle-class parents to carefully monitor their children's progress in school and to intervene when problems arose (see also Cucchiara 2013; Horvat et al. 2003; Sui-Chu and Willms 1996; Useem 1992).³

Those efforts, however, also had limits. During the school day, for example, middle-class parents could not always be there to step in and ensure their children's success. Given those limits, middle-class parents taught their children that they could ensure their own success by practicing strategies of influence. Those strategies included using teachers as resources, being assertive in making requests for support, and avoiding consequences for missteps.

Teaching Resourcefulness

Looking back on their own experiences in school and in the workforce, middle-class parents viewed support-seeking as a tremendously beneficial skill. Ms. Matthews, for example, is a kindergarten teacher and a married mother of three children. Her husband has a bachelor's degree and works as a regional manager for a communications company. In my interview with Ms. Matthews, conducted after her son Tyler's fifth-grade year, she talked about how important it is for children to feel comfortable advocating for themselves:

I really feel like they need to have those skills . . . to be able to talk to [the] teacher to understand and to work through those problems. I tell my kids: "This is a place where you go every day. You talk to this teacher every day. He's invested in your interests. He likes you. You couldn't be any safer unless you were at my house." [I tell them:] "It's okay to ask questions in that setting." And once they learn to overcome that hurdle, it becomes easier to then deal with asking for [other things]. When you get into a boss situation, your mom doesn't call and say, "Sorry my son doesn't understand what he's supposed to come and do today at work." You know, you need to learn how to do that! And if you don't start at this stage, it makes it more difficult and then you get fired!

Middle-class parents expected that children's requests would result in rewards, not reprimands. They also worried that not seeking support could result in serious negative consequences—even getting fired.

Thus, when middle-class children encountered problems in school, their parents encouraged them to use their teachers as "resources" to support them in overcoming the challenges they faced. Ms. Giordano, for example, is a married mother of three children. She has a college degree and a job as a midlevel manager at a health care company. Her husband has a bachelor's degree and works in graphic design. Ms. Giordano's daughter, Gina, is bubbly and outgoing; she often got in trouble for talking in class. In fourth grade, Gina's grades began slipping from A's and B's to B's and C's. Ms. Giordano was worried. Rather than intervene, however, Ms. Giordano encouraged Gina to "use her resources" and go to her teacher for help:

It's like I encourage Gina: "Go to the source. That's who your resource is, your teacher." We always tell her, "You go up and you talk to the teacher. You don't use your friends. You go to the teacher and find out." Like, Gina was [struggling with math homework] . . . and I told her, "Well, go ask your teacher what that means. That's your resource."

At Maplewood, teachers would often encourage students to "ask three before me"—to try to get help from classmates before approaching the teacher with questions. Like Ms. Giordano, however, middle-class parents believed that it was best for students to use the teacher as their primary resource because other students might also be confused and might give incorrect information. Middle-class parents recognized that teachers alone knew what would be "on the test." As a result, middle-class parents coached their children to turn to teachers—and not to peers—for support in overcoming challenges at school.

Teaching Assertiveness

Middle-class parents also explicitly coached their children to be assertive in interactions with authorities and especially when asking for support in managing challenges at school. Ms. Bell is a married mother of four. She has a bachelor's degree and works part-time as a physical therapist. Her husband is a corporate lawyer. Ms. Bell is bubbly and outgoing, and she expects all her children to be comfortable asserting themselves in interactions with others. Describing her son Aidan, a fifth grader at Maplewood, Ms. Bell noted,

Well, Aidan's shy. He's really very shy. We're still working on eye contact, that kind of stuff. So, anyhow, we got him a book on male etiquette, and how you do things. And one of the things in it was how to shake hands. Well, we're sitting there reading it in the car and belly-laughing, you know: "You give three pumps. No more than three pumps."

Ms. Bell laughed as she explained this. She seemed to recognize that there was a bit of absurdity in teaching a 10-year-old to have a firm, professional handshake. However, she also stressed that such lessons were important for Aidan, and she coached him to be assertive in his interactions with teachers as well. In an interview conducted during the summer after Aidan's fifth-grade year, Ms. Bell recalled how Aidan struggled regularly with assignments in fourth grade. She also recounted in detail how she had encouraged Aidan to ask his teacher for help:

And I go: "Aidan, why don't you ask Ms. Nelson for help?" And he goes: "I did, and she tells me to ask my neighbor. But all of them needed help." And I said: "You need to tell her that. You really just have to keep pushing. This is a lesson. You're gonna like some teachers, you're not gonna not like some. You're gonna have a boss you like, and a boss you don't like. You have to not let her take away your dream. You have to keep your attitude positive, and you're gonna learn from this. You're gonna think back on this: 'I made it through this, I can make it through this now.' So you really just have to keep pushing."

Like Ms. Bell, middle-class parents would often coach their children to "keep pushing" with their requests. A few middle-class parents (mostly those who were upwardly mobile) did worry that teachers might be frustrated if students made too many requests. However, even those parents still encouraged their children to feel comfortable voicing their needs. In doing so, and like middle-class parents more generally, they recognized teachers as key "resources," and they taught their children to be assertive in using those resources to manage problems at school.

Teaching Consequence Avoidance

Middle-class parents also taught their children (seemingly more inadvertent) messages about the importance of avoiding consequences for missteps. When middle-class children forgot their homework, for example, their parents would often drive the forgotten homework to school, despite the fact that Maplewood policy explicitly discouraged parents from doing so. Other parents would e-mail the teacher with excuses (e.g., "It was a really crazy morning" or "We were out late last night at his brother's soccer game") and ask that their child be excused from any punishment.

Middle-class messages about avoiding consequences were particularly common with respect to homework, but they also extended to larger issues as well. Christian Shore, for example, is a smart and high-achieving middle-class student, but he would often lash out at teachers and classmates with

mean or sarcastic remarks. One morning in fifth grade, Ms. Hudson had her students write short essays describing their favorite place "in as much detail as possible." When they finished, Ms. Hudson had the students edit their stories with a partner, and then she cold-called a few students to read their essays aloud. Christian's essay about his bedroom was short and vague, just listing a few things such as "good books," "video games," and a "television." After Christian finished reading the essay, Ms. Hudson chided him for not including more detail. That response prompted a tirade from Christian:

Christian leans forward in his chair and protests loudly: "But I did do that and Lizbeth [my partner] told me it was bad!" Ms. Hudson takes a step backward and blinks as though unsure what to say in response. Lizbeth pipes up to defend herself. Shaking her head, Lizbeth sneers: "He wrote about an outlet!" She explains dismissively that Christian's original (longer) essay was "silly"—it was about the electrical outlet that powers all his favorite gadgets. As Lizbeth reveals all of this, Christian shrinks in his chair, sliding lower and lower. His face is a deep crimson color.

Flustered, Ms. Hudson tried to move on, calling on another student to share. Meanwhile, Christian just glared at Lizbeth from across the table where they were both sitting:

As the other student reads aloud, Christian sits up suddenly and begins to pound on his desk with his fist, growling through gritted teeth. He continues like this for just a few seconds—though it feels like much longer—and then slumps back in his chair again. Christian finishes his tirade just as the other student concludes her story. A few students clap politely for the speaker, but most are looking warily at Christian. Christian, meanwhile, sits up tall in his seat and begins to clap with false enthusiasm. He smacks both hands together loud and slow. Rather than look at the speaker, however, Christian glares at Lizbeth with a deep scowl on his face.

Later, Ms. Hudson took Christian aside to talk with him privately about his behavior. She also wrote an e-mail to Ms. Shore, letting her know about the outburst. Rather than thanking the teacher and indicating that she would correct her son, the mother defended him. As Ms. Shore explained in an interview after Christian's fifth-grade year,

His behavior has only improved over time. I've always been comfortable saying it's harder for a little boy to sit still all day. And in first and second grade [before his gluten sensitivity was diagnosed], his food allergies could have been making him agitated. And he's very bright. And he has a lot of energy. But he's learned to manage it, and he's not having any negative impact on the class.

Like Ms. Shore, middle-class parents were quick to justify their children's missteps. They would also try to protect their children from consequences. As discussed in subsequent sections, that leniency seemed to teach middle-class children that their well-being should be ensured and that they should feel comfortable relying on others to accommodate their needs.

Middle-Class Parents' Competing Priorities

Middle-class parents believed that coaching their children to use strategies of influence would promote academic success. Such success was a priority for middle-class families. Thus, while middle-class parents sometimes taught their children about responsibility and other aspects of good character, those lessons often took a back seat to academic priorities.

In some cases, parents had to decide whether to prioritize hard work or good grades. Ms. Corsaro, for example, is a former teacher and stay-at-home mother of three children. In an interview conducted after fifth grade, Ms. Corsaro recalled how, in third grade, her daughter Julie was placed in the advanced math class. For the first time, Julie started having trouble with homework. As Ms. Corsaro explained,

Julie's used to being good at things. And for math, for example, when they first started placing them, and she was on a higher-level math, and she really had to work for it, she wasn't used to that. She was used to things just coming easily to her. And she was discouraged. And I hate to see that in her, because I want to instill a good work ethic. I want her to realize, like, not everything is just handed to you. But she struggles with that. And it was a battle every night when she was doing her homework. "I don't understand this" and "It's so hard." And math is definitely my weakest subject, so I wasn't much help there. And there was one time, in fourth grade, I was helping her with it, and I was like: "Oh! It's all coming back to me." And then she went in, and she got everything wrong. And I said: "I am not helping you with math anymore. You have to go and see Ms. Phillips and tell her that you need help." And Ms. Phillips was wonderful and gave her some extra help. And it just clicked.

Ms. Corsaro wanted Julie to develop a "good work ethic," but she was also reluctant to let her struggle on her own. Instead, Ms. Corsaro tried to help Julie herself, and when it became clear that such assistance would not be enough to ensure that Julie got the answers correct, Ms. Corsaro coached her daughter to go to the teacher for help instead.

The tension between school success and good character was also apparent in situations in which parents had to decide whether to teach their children to take responsibility for their own actions or to avoid consequences for

misbehavior. Later in her interview, Ms. Corsaro described, her voice breaking as though she was holding back tears, the hand-holding she had done for her children and her conflicted stance on not holding them more accountable:

I think I've done a disservice to my kids by being so involved in school. Like, they forget things. And I get a phone call [from school, asking to bring in a missing item], and generally I'm there almost every day, so I do drop things off. And so there's no consequence. . . . I mean, I really do think it's a valuable lesson [to face consequences], that that's the best way to learn. But I don't want them to suffer.

Like Ms. Corsaro, middle-class parents at Maplewood wanted their children to learn habits such as work ethic and personal responsibility, but they also did not want their children to "suffer," either academically or emotionally. At least in most cases, then, middle-class parents' desire to ensure their children's school success ultimately trumped their concerns about developing good character.

WORKING-CLASS PARENTS: COACHING DEFERENCE

Like working-class parents in other studies, the working-class parents at Maplewood viewed character development as one of their primary parenting responsibilities. They seemed keenly aware of negative stereotypes portraying less privileged people as "lazy" and "rude." Given that awareness, working-class parents actively tried to distance themselves and their children from such negative labels and from the kinds of sanctions that might result from them (Edwards 2004).

With their children, working-class parents stressed the importance of demonstrating good character, particularly in situations (e.g., at school) in which parents could not be there to guide and direct them. Specifically, working-class parents coached their children to use strategies of deference when interacting with teachers and managing problems at school. Those strategies included treating teachers with respect, tackling problems on their own, and taking responsibility for their actions.

Teaching Respect

Like Mr. Graham in the opening example, working-class parents wanted to raise children who were, first and foremost, good people. Ms. Trumble, for

example, is a married mother of five children. She did not finish high school and is not formally employed, but she earns a little money by babysitting friends' and relatives' children during work hours. Mr. Trumble went to a vocational high school and has a full-time job as a maintenance worker. In an interview conducted after her son Jeremy's fifth-grade year, Ms. Trumble described her goals for her children:

I think the teacher's role is to, you know, *teach* 'em. Teach 'em their education, what they need to know. Like, the education part. I don't expect them to teach my kids their morals and stuff like that. I believe we teach them that at home. I'm not very religious, so it's not like that. I just want 'em to be raised to be good, decent people. To learn to respect other people, and to be nice. I think just having respect for other people. And respect for themselves. Treat people the way you want to be treated.

Like other working-class parents, Ms. Trumble wanted her children to do well in school. When her son Jeremy struggled with learning to read, Ms. Trumble fretted about how it might affect him long term, and she was tremendously grateful when Jeremy's teacher offered to provide him with extra support. At the same time, however, and also like other working-class parents, Ms. Trumble focused her own coaching efforts on teaching her children to be "good, decent people."

Working-class parents also cautioned their children that a lack of respect—particularly for teachers and other authorities—could have serious, negative consequences. Looking back on their own experiences in school, working-class parents assumed that students who complained or asked for help would be perceived as disrespectful and might even be reprimanded by their teachers. Mr. Graham, for example, recalled in his interview a story he had told his own children about a time when one of his teachers yelled at him for "challenging her" about a test question. He noted,

The teacher gave us a test and none of us understood. We were like, "What are you talking about?" I mean, it was like she thought she explained it clear as day. And we read it, but it just didn't jive. [And] she was upset because we asked her about it. She yelled at us, cuz she just didn't understand why we didn't get it! That was a rough little time in school. I mean, a number of us were upset about it, crying upset about it. I think I probably took the brunt of it, cuz I was the one that challenged her.

Like Mr. Graham, working-class parents believed that children's requests—even well-meaning ones—might be perceived as disrespectful and might result in reprimand. Thus, working-class parents stressed that children should be "good for the teachers" by not burdening them with questions or requests.

Teaching Work Ethic

For working-class parents, respect was not the only element of character that might be undermined by an overreliance on support from others. Rather, working-class parents believed that such support would also undermine children's developing work ethic. Thus, when problems arose, working-class parents coached their children to manage on their own. Ms. Webb, for example, has a GED, and her husband is a high school graduate; they both work as convenience store clerks. During the summer after her daughter Sadie's fifth-grade year, Ms. Webb and I sat at the kitchen table in their mobile home. Ms. Webb's daughter Sadie, who had been watching television in the next room, came into the kitchen to get a drink. As I wrote in my field notes,

Sadie opens a kitchen cabinet and pulls out a plastic cup. Turning to her mother, Sadie asks politely: "Can you help me get the iced tea?" Ms. Webb raises her eyebrow skeptically and laughs: "Get it yourself! What're you asking me for?" Sadie nods sheepishly and pulls a chair out from the kitchen table, using it to climb up and retrieve the can of iced tea mix from the cabinet above the refrigerator. As Sadie does this, Ms. Webb turns to me and says playfully: "She's a spoiled brat. Not gonna make it in the real world." I smile awkwardly, asking: "Whadda you mean?" Ms. Webb continues: "Sadie's a handful. She has a whining problem. I don't know if you've noticed it at school, but she has a whining problem at home."

Ms. Webb viewed Sadie's request for help as "whining," something only a "spoiled brat" would do. Like other working-class parents, Ms. Webb discouraged that kind of reliance on others and instructed her children to deal with problems on their own instead.

Like Ms. Webb, working-class parents at Maplewood were not shy about criticizing their children for a lack of hard work. Ms. Compton, for example, is a single mother of two children. She has completed some community college and works part-time in retail. In conversations with her children, Ms. Compton stressed that it was "lazy" to rely on others for support. During an interview conducted after her son Jesse's fifth-grade year, Ms. Compton explained that those conversations often took place while working with her Jesse on homework:⁴

Jesse can be lazy. He's very, "I can't do it. I don't know what I'm doing." But he just needs a push to do it on his own. I just tell him, "You can do it. I know you can do it. I've seen you do this. I want you to try." Then he gets his confidence up and he snaps out of that low moment.

Like many working-class parents, Ms. Compton felt a responsibility to oversee homework but not to assist in its completion. She worried that

assistance would promote "laziness" and thus pushed Jesse to "do it on his own" instead.

Teaching Personal Responsibility

Working-class parents also coached deference by holding children accountable for their actions and by stressing the importance of personal responsibility. With homework, for example, none of the working-class parents recalled driving back to school to drop off or pick up forgotten items. Working-class parents were also highly critical of the kinds of parents who would fail to hold their own children accountable for missteps. Ms. Campitello, for example, is a married mother of three children. She is a high school graduate and works part-time in the school cafeteria. Her husband is also a high school graduate and works as a plumber. Ms. Campitello appreciated the quality of the education her children received at Maplewood, but she spoke with disdain about the kinds of character traits commonly displayed by students and parents at the school. Comparing Maplewood to the working-class school her children previously attended, Ms. Campitello sneered,

Parents here don't make their kids accountable or responsible for anything. They do everything for their kids. Everything. It's ridiculous. They don't make their kids responsible for anything. They're not responsible for their actions. And being a cafeteria worker, it's a perfect example. A kid left their cell phone in the cafeteria, and the parent called asking me to find it for them. Are you kidding me? In the olden days, it's like, you left your cell phone in the cafeteria? Well, you better hope it's still there tomorrow.

Like Ms. Campitello, working-class parents believed that letting children avoid consequences and rely on adults to solve problems for them would undermine their sense of responsibility.

That emphasis on personal responsibility was particularly apparent with homework and other small items, but it extended to larger issues as well. Ms. Webb, for example, recalled being distraught when she learned that her older daughter, Suzie, was taking things from her first-grade classmates:

Initially, they told me it was an issue with "borrowing." But a month later, it came out that she was stealing. They said: "You know, hey, Suzie's taking stuff from other kids. She's not asking."

Ms. Webb was horrified at Suzie's behavior, so she took matters into her own hands:

I resolved it at home. Suzie stole a Chap Stick, so I made her hold it. If she was watching TV, she held it. If she was eating dinner, she held it. If she was playing outside, she held it. She hasn't stolen since. But apparently that's excessive discipline. According to the school, that's abuse and they called Social Services, who came out and said: "Yeah, I understand what you're saying. She hasn't done it since, so next time just limit it [the punishment] to an hour."

The school found out about Ms. Webb's punishment when Suzie continued holding the Chap Stick all through class, prompting them to contact "Social Services." Such visits were not the norm for working-class families at Maplewood. However, working-class parents did let their children suffer consequences, including consequences that teachers deemed too severe. In doing so, working-class parents taught their children to accept responsibility for their actions and not to ask for reprieve.

Working-Class Parents' Competing Priorities

This is not to say that working-class parents viewed character development as their only responsibility as parents. On the contrary, the working-class parents at Maplewood cared deeply about their children's academic success. They wanted their children to do well in school, and some had even moved to Maplewood specifically to give their children a "high-quality" education. Like working-class parents in other studies (Horvat et al. 2003; Lareau 2000; Useem 1992), however, the working-class parents at Maplewood often felt less than confident in their own school-based knowledge and skills. As a result, they viewed teachers as "experts" who would know what was best for their children academically, and they generally deferred to their children's teachers on school-related matters.

Thus, even when working-class parents were skeptical of teachers' actions or advice, and even when their children's academic success was on the line, they rarely spoke up; they believed it would be rude to challenge the teachers' authority and might result in reprimands. Ms. Higgins, for example, is a stay-at-home mother of two children. She has a high school diploma. Her husband is also a high school graduate, and he works as a truck driver. In an interview conducted after her daughter Shannon's fifth-grade year, Ms. Higgins recalled being worried about Shannon (her younger daughter) when she started school:

We knew that there was something a little off with Shannon, academically. Being home 100% with them, and you're not supposed to compare children, but I knew that it wasn't just the personality difference, there was something off.

When Shannon started kindergarten (at a predominantly working-class school approximately 10 miles from Maplewood), Ms. Higgins let the school administrators know about her concerns. The school tested Shannon for learning disabilities and found that she had speech and processing delays. Ms. Higgins was thrilled that Shannon would be getting help, recalling, "So, in kindergarten, I thought, 'Okay, this is gonna be great.'" By January, however, the school had not provided any of the academic support to which Shannon was entitled. Ms. Higgins continued to wait, hoping for the best. She waited until the end of kindergarten and all through first grade. I asked Ms. Higgins if she talked to the school administrators, and she sighed, explaining,

I was told that there was nobody to cover the services [Shannon needed]. And she was lost because she wasn't understanding. But I'm very easy-going as far as recommendations and suggestions. I don't tell the teachers what she needs—because teachers are with her in that sense. [They] know what's in her best interest. And I feel that they're not going to direct me in a way that's going to be harmful or hurt her in any way.

Ms. Higgins waited for 2 full years, but the school never provided Shannon with the support to which she was entitled. At the end of first grade, when the family moved to Maplewood, Shannon was barely performing at a kindergarten level—unable to read or write or even recognize letters and numbers. The teachers at Maplewood jumped into action immediately: By the end of Shannon's second week of second grade, she was receiving daily learning support, and by the end of fifth grade, she was less than half a year below grade level. And yet, such problems could have been avoided—and Shannon could have caught up more quickly—if someone had acted sooner.

The point here is not to blame Ms. Higgins or the teachers at Shannon's old school. The point is that working-class parents such as Ms. Higgins experienced a real tension between demonstrating good character and ensuring their children's success in school. In those moments, and driven by real fears about reprimand and social judgment, they prioritized respect, hard work, and personal responsibility.

COACHING'S CONSEQUENCES

In light of their parents' coaching, children generally came to internalize the messages they learned at home. That process was not an automatic one. However, over time, most students adopted their parents' beliefs about good grades and good character and also learned to practice the strategies that their parents taught them for managing problems at school.

Internalizing Messages About Influence and Deference

Children's internalization of parents' class-based coaching could be seen, in part, through parallels in parents' and children's responses to interview vignettes. During (separate) interviews with children and parents (conducted during the summer after the child's fifth-grade year), I read aloud brief, fictional stories about common classroom challenges. I then asked open-ended questions such as "What do you think Jason should do?" and "What do you think Kelly's mother will say?" Although the answers varied, I was able to identify the primary theme of each response and compare the prevalence of themes by age and social class. Responses to the vignette questions followed clear class-based patterns, with children's responses closely mirroring those of their parents.

Table 1.1, for example, reveals cross-generational similarities in beliefs about the appropriateness of using teachers as resources to overcome problems in school. The table describes parents' and children's responses to a vignette about "Jason," a student struggling to understand a test question. All of the interviewed middle-class parents said that Jason should go to the teacher to ask for help, and all but two of the middle-class children responded similarly. Those two students both said that Jason should probably go to the teacher for help but added the caveat that it depends

Table 1.1 SUMMARY OF OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES TO VIGNETTE 1
BY SOCIAL CLASS^a

Vignette 1: Mr. Patrick's fifth-grade class is working on a science test. Mr. Patrick is at his desk, grading papers. Jason, one of the students, gets to the third question and reads it silently to himself. It says: "Make a chart comparing the atmospheres on the earth and on the moon." Jason is confused—he isn't sure how to answer the question, or what to include in the chart.

Prompt: What do you think Jason should do?

Response by Primary Theme	Middle-Class		Working-Class	
	Parents	Children	Parents	Children
Jason should go to the teacher for help	12	10	0	2
Jason should try his best	0	0	5	4
It depends on the teacher's rules	0	2	2	2
Jason should wait; the teacher will likely notice him struggling and offer help	0	0	2	1
<i>Total</i>	12	12	9	9

^aResponses to vignettes were open-ended. I coded responses into themes to highlight patterns. Coded responses are presented here for ease of comparison.

on the teacher's rules. Working-class responses to this vignette were more varied, but there were often marked similarities between parents' answers and those given by their children. The most frequent response for both working-class parents and working-class children was that Jason should just try his best to answer the question on his own. Others indicated that Jason should wait because the teacher would likely notice that he is struggling and offer assistance. Still others said that it depends on the teacher's rules. None of the working-class parents said that Jason should go to the teacher for help, but two of the working-class students did suggest such a response. In both of those cases, however, the students later talked about how they were often reluctant to ask for help themselves out of concern that their requests might result in reprimand. They worried, for example, that if they asked for help, teachers would assume they did not read the test directions or that they were off-task when the material was presented in class. Those working-class students also worried about being perceived as disrespectful if they disrupted others by talking to the teacher during a test.

Class-based parallels between parents and children could also be seen in attitudes about whether it is better to trust or question teachers' judgment. Table 1.2 describes parents' and children's responses to a vignette about "Brian," who came home complaining about being "bored" in math class. All of the middle-class parents and almost all of the middle-class children

Table 1.2 SUMMARY OF OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES TO VIGNETTE 2
BY SOCIAL CLASS^a

Vignette 2: Brian, a fifth grader, usually gets good grades in math and does well on tests. Brian comes home from school one day and tells his mom that he is often bored during math class.

Prompt: What do you think should happen with Brian?

Response by Primary Theme	Middle-Class		Working-Class	
	Parents	Children	Parents	Children
Brian's mother should ask the teacher to move him up or give him extra work	9	5	2	0
Brian should ask the teacher to give him extra work	3	4	0	0
Brian's mother should ask for the teacher's advice at conferences	0	0	2	0
If it's really an issue, the teacher would notice and help Brian	0	0	3	1
Brian just needs to be more focused	0	2	2	5
Brian just does not like the material	0	1	0	3
Total	12	12	9	9

^aResponses to vignettes were open-ended. I coded responses into themes to highlight patterns. Coded responses are presented here for ease of comparison.

assumed that Brian was bored because he was not being challenged enough. They also suggested that Brian should receive accommodations (e.g., moving up a math level or receiving supplementary work to complete) and that he should obtain such accommodations either by having his mother contact the teacher or by talking to the teacher directly. Again, working-class responses were more varied. However, compared to their middle-class peers, both working-class parents and their children seemed to see less of a need for requesting accommodations. Instead, they typically suggested that Brian just needs to be more focused in class or that if Brian's boredom was really an issue, the teacher would notice and offer to help.

Children also seemed to have adopted their parents' class-based beliefs about accountability. Table 1.3 describes parents' and children's responses to a vignette about "Kelly," who left a homework packet at school. The vast majority of middle-class respondents believed that Kelly should not have to suffer any penalty. Instead, both middle-class parents and their children suggested either that Kelly's parent should drive her back to school to retrieve the homework or that Kelly should be allowed to call a friend

Table 1.3 SUMMARY OF OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES TO VIGNETTE 3
BY SOCIAL CLASS^a

Vignette 3: Kelly gets home from school and opens her backpack to get out her homework. Reaching inside, Kelly realizes that she forgot to bring home the Social Studies packet that she is supposed to finish for tomorrow.

Prompt: What do you think should happen with Kelly?

Response by Primary Theme	Middle-Class		Working-Class	
	Parents	Children	Parents	Children
Kelly should be driven back to school to retrieve the homework packet	5	5	0	0
Kelly should call a friend to copy the questions	6	4	3	4
Kelly should have to suffer the consequences	1	0	6	2
Kelly should tell the teacher and hope that she will be allowed to turn in the homework late without penalty ^b	0	3	0	3
Total	12	12	9	9

^aResponses to vignettes were open-ended. I coded responses into themes to highlight patterns. Coded responses are presented here for ease of comparison.

^bThe wording of responses in this category varied somewhat between middle-class and working-class students. Middle-class students tended to suggest that Kelly should try to convince the teacher to allow her to turn in the homework late. As one middle-class student explained, "She should try to explain to her teacher because sometimes it's hard when this happens to you. The teacher might just think she's making an excuse, but she should try her best to explain. And the teacher should understand." Working-class students tended to view Kelly's fate as resting more with the teacher. As a working-class student explained, "She should go back and ask the teacher nicely if she can do it the next day. And maybe she'll get an extra day, but the teacher might just say: 'Well, I'm sorry but it was due today, so you have to stay in for recess.'"

(either to borrow and photocopy the packet or to write down the questions over the phone). Working-class respondents were instead inclined to believe that Kelly should be held responsible for her actions. Whereas a few respondents suggested the phone-a-friend option, none believed that Kelly should be driven back to school, and most suggested that Kelly should just suffer the consequences (although working-class children were more likely than their parents to hold out hope for reprieve).

Practicing Influence and Deference

Children's internalization of parents' coaching could also be seen in the way that they thought about and navigated classroom challenges. As noted previously, however, that process was far from automatic, with some children taking longer to follow their parents' lead.

Middle-Class Children: Practicing Influence at School

Consistent with their parents' coaching, middle-class students treated their teachers as resources. However, whereas some middle-class students readily adopted such strategies, others, including very high-achieving students, took more coaxing. Mr. and Ms. Dobrin both have advanced degrees and work full-time as computer engineers. Their oldest son, Ethan, excels in school, earning almost all A's and scoring extremely high on standardized tests. Ethan was very comfortable with certain kinds of requests—for example, asking for extra recesses or more time to study before a test or to demonstrate a new karate move. At the same time, Ethan was hesitant to admit when he was confused or struggling because he worried that it might make him seem "dumb." Given that reluctance, the Dobrins tried to stress to Ethan the importance of voicing his needs. Ms. Dobrin described that coaching in an interview that took place after Ethan's fifth-grade year:

Ethan's teacher evaluations always said, "He's a joy. He's bright. He's making great grades, but he needs to ask for help sometimes." Now, I don't think asking for help is comfortable for Ethan, but what we try to impress on him is, "Think about how important it is that you get that information. If you need that information to do the job correctly, then you need to ask the teacher."

Chiming in, Mr. Dobrin added brightly,

Having to admit that he can't do something is hard for Ethan. But you just have to do that sometimes. And he did it. Like, we've coached him into, when he hasn't understood

something, to e-mail his teacher and get the information. And [Ethan] would push back at first, but eventually he'd either send the teacher an e-mail, or tell him the next day, and the teacher would help him figure it out.

Like other middle-class parents, the Dobrins viewed help-seeking as a critical skill and one that would have direct benefits in terms of academic achievement. They also encouraged Ethan to perceive such requests in a similar way and to be willing to "flag a teacher down, or get up and go talk to the teacher during a test."

Those efforts seemed to hit their mark. As Ethan explained in an interview after fifth grade, he drew on his parents' coaching to seek support in school:

Like, one time I was working on a research project, on the brain. And I couldn't find anything on the Internet to answer my questions, so I kept searching, and after three hours, my mom and dad started doing the research for me, and we still couldn't figure out some of it, so they told me to ask Mr. Fischer. And so I went in the next day and I said: "I couldn't figure it out. I couldn't find it on the Internet. Can you help me find it?" And Mr. Fischer got me to the right website that actually showed me the right information.

Essentially, Ethan seemed to have internalized his parents' lessons about the benefits of using teachers as resources in school.

Over time, high-achieving students such as Ethan gradually became more comfortable voicing their struggles. By the time Ethan finished fifth grade, he regularly called out with questions, as he did during a math test in Mr. Fischer's class:

The room is quiet as the students work on their tests. Ethan looks up and taps his pencil eraser lightly against his cheek, frowning. As Mr. Fischer circles past, Ethan calls out quietly but hopefully, "Mr. Fischer?" Mr. Fischer immediately stops and turns toward Ethan, asking with genuine concern: "You okay?" Ethan shrugs and admits that he is not sure if he is interpreting a question correctly. Squatting down, Mr. Fischer does not give Ethan the answer, but helps him recognize his mistake. Ethan nods, quickly finishing the problem correctly.

In my interview with Ethan after fifth grade, I asked why he went to the teacher with questions. Wide-eyed he explained:

I didn't want to guess and risk getting it wrong. I don't want to get it wrong, because then I won't get as high a grade as I should have gotten. So it's just better to go up and ask the teacher. And then normally I would get it right.

Although Ethan was initially reluctant to ask for support, his parents' persistent messaging eventually convinced him that it was better to ask than to "risk getting it wrong."

In light of the lessons about support-seeking that they learned at home, middle-class students were generally assertive in making requests. That assertiveness, however, did not always come easily. Rather, and particularly in the case of very shy children, middle-class parents had to step up their game. Ms. Long, for example, was a divorced mother of two children who worked full-time as a public relations specialist and was in the process of completing a master's degree. Ms. Long's daughter, Keri, was painfully shy. As a result, Keri was reluctant to ask her teacher for help when she started having trouble with math in third grade. Ms. Long recounted the following exchange:

Keri was doing well in third grade. She had straight A's until this one math test. . . . [Before the test, she came to me] and said, "I'm confused about this." And I said, "Go talk to your teacher about it! You need to tell your teacher this is what you need help with."

Ms. Long was very direct in encouraging Keri to ask for help. Keri, however, was reluctant to take her mother's advice, and she did not ask for help before the test. Shaking her head disappointedly, Ms. Long continued her story:

She didn't have the power in her to do it. To say: "I need help." And that brought her grade down! She got a C on the test and it brought her down. Which, to me, was very upsetting, because I told her, "Go! Get help!" And she just . . . I dunno. Keri's very timid, very shy. I'm trying to teach her to look up and shake hands. That adults aren't scary and that the teachers are there to help her. It's getting better, but it's taken her a really long time.

Ms. Long was frustrated and disappointed by Keri's reluctance, but she was not deterred. Instead, and like other middle-class parents of shy children, Ms. Long continued encouraging Keri to voice her needs.

That persistence also paid off. Keri never overcame her shyness entirely, but she gradually became more comfortable asserting herself in interactions with teachers. During a social studies test in fifth grade, Keri readily acknowledged that she was struggling with one of the short-essay questions. The question read: "Identify one main event in the Civil War and describe its significance."

Before setting the students to work, Ms. Dunham calls out "Use your resources. But it's open book, not open neighbor!" After working for a few minutes, Keri picks up her textbook and carries it with her as she approaches Ms. Dunham's desk. Pointing at a passage in the book, she asks quietly, "Does this count as a main event?" After glancing

at the book, Ms. Dunham explains, "This is a good event, but you probably want to look for something larger." Ms. Dunham then helps Keri recall some significant events they discussed in class.

In third grade, I rarely saw Keri ask for help. She did so only when teachers approached her to offer assistance or when she could "piggyback" on requests made by friends or classmates. By fifth grade, on the other hand, Keri regularly went to her teachers with questions and requests, although, like other shy students, she was still more timid in those interactions than were most of her middle-class peers.

Keri also linked her increasing comfort interacting with teachers to her mother's encouragement. I interviewed Keri during the summer after fifth grade. She sat curled in a ball on a living room chair, playing with the digital voice recorder I was using to record the interview. Throughout the interview, Keri's voice barely went above a whisper, and she made eye contact with me only rarely. However, when I asked Keri to tell me about fifth grade, Keri looked up and smiled broadly, saying, "It was good. I liked my teacher. She was nice. Like, she'd only call on you if you raised your hand first. And she was just nice." Similarly, when I asked Keri what students should do if they are confused or struggling in school, Keri responded emphatically, "Ask for help. My mom tells me that I should do it. And so I usually go and ask Ms. Dunham." Through their parents' ongoing efforts, shy middle-class students such as Keri eventually learned to feel comfortable (or at least more comfortable) asserting their needs and desires, and they reaped the rewards for doing so.

Given their parents' reluctance to hold them accountable, middle-class children were generally very comfortable avoiding (or at least trying to avoid) consequences for their missteps. In an interview after fifth grade, I showed Christian Shore the Kelly vignette about forgotten homework. Responding to the vignette, he stressed that if students "go up right away and explain," teachers will usually respond with lenience. He noted,

This has happened to me a couple of times and it's annoying when it happens, but what I think [Kelly] should do is try to explain to her teacher. I'd go up in the beginning of the day and not wait until the last second. If you wait, they might think you're making excuses. If you go up right away and explain, you could say that you'll get it done tonight and bring it in tomorrow. I think the teacher would probably understand. They'd probably just tell you to do it tonight. No problem. They usually understand. It's not your fault if they don't.

Like other middle-class students, Christian had internalized the idea that teachers could be persuaded to reduce or eliminate standard punishments

(e.g., grade penalties for missing assignments), and he was generally very comfortable seeking such reprieves.

Working-Class Children: Practicing Deference at School

Consistent with their parents' coaching, working-class students were careful to be respectful of their teachers. Jared Carson, for example, is a high-achieving, athletic, and popular working-class student. At recess, everyone wanted to be on his team, and as one teacher noted, "Jared is one of the most likeable kids in the class." Like most of the other boys in the grade, Jared also loved making jokes, but he was careful to avoid upsetting the teacher in the process. In an interview after fifth grade, Jared compared his approach to humor with that of Christian Shore, the middle-class student whose comments and outbursts in class often got him into trouble:

Christian's like, the funniest kid in the grade, but he's funny because he gets in trouble and does funny stuff. And he's not afraid to get in trouble. But I don't do actions that are really disrespectful or something. I usually just like, make jokes. Like, I poke, I don't stab. So I really don't do anything to make fun of someone, or to make them feel bad. And I wouldn't do it if [the teacher] was in a bad mood, or if Christian just got in trouble.

Like Jared, working-class students were often keenly attuned to the needs and temperaments of those around them. Even when seeking attention (i.e., by making jokes), they calibrated their actions to avoid disrespecting teachers or eliciting a negative response.

In light of what their parents taught them about the importance of a strong work ethic, working-class students generally tried to work through problems on their own rather than burden teachers with requests. In an interview during the summer after fifth grade, Shannon Higgins explained what students need to do if they want to do well in school:

You need to work hard and learn things. Like, teachers give you homework to learn things. And then if you get help from your mom and dad, you're not learning that stuff. And if you get it from a calculator, you still don't learn it.

When talking about challenges in school and about success more generally, working-class students often echoed their parents' sentiments about the drawbacks of relying on others, stressing that it was better to hide a problem or fix it themselves.

Following their parents' lessons about personal responsibility, working-class students rarely tried to avoid consequences for their missteps. I interviewed Ms. Trumble during the summer after her son Jeremy's fifth-grade

year. During the interview, Ms. Trumble noted that her son Jeremy "sometimes forgets stuff." She went on to describe her response in those situations:

I'll say, "You have to tell your teacher that you forgot it, and stay in for recess and get it done then." And that's what he ends up doing. Because I tell him, "There's nothing I can do. You forgot your homework. I don't know what it was."

Like other working-class parents, Ms. Trumble held her son accountable for his missteps. That expectation of personal responsibility stuck with Jeremy, as evidenced in fourth grade when he left his book report at home:

Slumping into his seat next to Tory (middle-class, white), Jeremy laments, "I finally finished my book report last night, and then I left it at home." Tory looks at Jeremy and asks, puzzled, "Can't your mom bring it for you?" Jeremy shakes his head. "She has to work, so if I forget things, she says it's my responsibility." Tory blinks, bewildered. Later, when Ms. Burns checks homework, Jeremy apologizes and admits that he does not have his project. Ms. Burns says disappointedly: "You'll have to stay in for recess." Jeremy nods and does not protest.

Working-class students such as Jeremy had internalized their parents' coaching. They held themselves accountable for their missteps, even when their parents were not there to guide them in doing so.

Because working-class parents expected obedience to authority (see also Lareau 2011), working-class children's resistance to parents' coaching was less overt. However, working-class children did not always want to do as they were told. As we saw with Ms. Webb and the iced tea, for example, working-class parents were not always pleased with their children's level of respect, work ethic, and personal responsibility. A number of working-class parents (and especially working-class parents of lower-achieving boys) also reported frequent struggles over homework. They expected children to complete homework "on their own." In reality, however, children often needed prompting and assistance to get it done. Over time, however, and in light of parents' persistent messages, even some of the most reluctant working-class children (e.g., Zach and Jesse) did become more independent with homework or, at the very least, stopped asking their parents for help.

OUTLIER CASES: MANAGING MOBILITY

It is important to note that there were variations in the frequency and fervor of parents' coaching. Some of that variation stemmed from the challenges

of getting shy and high-achieving middle-class students to feel comfortable seeking support. Other variations seemed to stem from the fact that social class is not always a fixed position. Upwardly mobile parents, for example, seemed to experience the tension between academic success and good character more acutely than did other parents. As a result, they were more ambivalent about the messages they conveyed to their children. That ambivalence, in turn, led children in upwardly mobile families to be more flexible in using strategies of influence and deference as well. These patterns can be seen in examples from two different upwardly mobile families—one middle class and one working class.

Upwardly Mobile Middle-Class Families

The upwardly mobile Healey family had a cautious attitude toward support-seeking and other strategies of influence. Both Healey parents grew up in working-class families and were first-generation college students. Both work full-time in finance. In their joint interview, conducted after their oldest son Ben's fifth-grade year, Mr. Healey explained that Ben is a high-achieving but shy student. Mr. Healey recalled how Ben's fifth-grade teacher, Mr. Potter, wanted Ben to be more comfortable seeking help:

Mr. Potter kept saying: "Ben needs to come to me for help." He thought that was really important for Ben, but I don't really know. Mr. Potter wanted Ben to open up: "When he needs help, come to me for help." He said that in every conference we had with him. But Ben wasn't struggling. I probably helped him with homework three times in six years. And I guess Mr. Potter's theory was: "This kid's eventually gonna need to come to somebody for help, and he needs to learn how to do that." But I don't think Ben actually needed to do that in Mr. Potter's class. So I didn't quite get it.

In light of Mr. Potter's repeated encouragement, the Healeys did talk to Ben about help-seeking. As Ms. Healey explained,

We did talk to Ben, a couple times. We said: "It's gonna get harder, and if there's anything you're in doubt about, you can talk to Mr. Potter." We told him several times throughout the year: "Listen, that's not a sign of weakness, it's a sign of strength. Everybody has weaknesses, everybody needs help, and you need to know when you need it." And Ben was like: "Yeah, I know."

At school, Ben would go to his teachers with clarifying questions (e.g., "Are we supposed to show our work?"), but he was more reluctant than most of his middle-class peers to admit when he was having trouble understanding

the material. Toward the end of fifth grade, Ben—a straight-A student—began to struggle in his advanced math class. Despite those struggles, Ben remained reluctant to ask for help, and he ultimately earned a B in math for his last marking period.

Ben's hesitance in those situations seemed to reflect his parents' ambivalent attitude toward help-seeking. Like the other middle-class parents at Maplewood, the Healeys did recognize that support could be useful, and they did (occasionally) encourage their son to approach teachers with requests. However, compared to other middle-class parents, the Healeys—especially Mr. Healey—were less adamant in their coaching efforts. The Healeys were also more skeptical of the potential benefits of help-seeking, even when not asking ultimately resulted in a lower grade.

Given their parents' ambivalence, children in upwardly mobile families had more nuanced attitudes about the relative benefits of influence and deference. Compared to other middle-class students, for example, Ben Healey seemed more cautious about relying on teachers for support and being assertive in making requests. In our interview after fifth grade, Ben explained that he preferred to "go to my friends for help" and to use teachers as a "last resort." He noted that he would often ask his friend Steve (middle class, Asian American) because "he's the smartest probably." Ben went on to describe how, if Steve could not help him, Steve would usually go to the teacher and then report back to Ben with the answer. In class, I sometimes saw them go up to the teacher together, and Steve would usually lead the way.

That reluctance to make requests seemed to reflect Ben's ambivalence about the benefits and drawbacks of such behaviors. In our interview, Ben spoke disdainfully about classmates who asked teachers to check their work on tests or projects (a standard practice among middle-class students that I discuss further in Chapter 3). Ben noted,

I never really did that. Because I think that's kind of like asking someone to do it for you. But they want to get a good grade, I guess. And I want to [do that too], but I think it's kind of cheap. Like, it's your work, you have to do it. Instead of having the teacher check it to see if it's wrong. And so I've definitely gotten a lot wrong.

As demonstrated in the previous examples, Ben's parents (especially his father) were skeptical of the benefits of support-seeking, and Ben seemed to have internalized that ambivalence. Like his middle-class peers, Ben clearly recognized a link between success in school and support from teachers. Unlike his middle-class friends, however, Ben was reluctant to exploit that opportunity for his own gain. Instead, he preferred to deal with problems on his own or rely on his friends for help, even when he got "a lot wrong" as a result.

Upwardly Mobile Working-Class Families

The upwardly mobile Carson family also had a complicated relationship to class-based parenting styles. Neither Mr. Carson nor Ms. Carson went to college, but they started a successful small business, and the income from the store allowed the Carsons to live very comfortably. They bought a house in a middle-class neighborhood. They took multiple vacations to the beach each summer. They enrolled their children in costly travel sports leagues. Except during trips to visit cousins out of state, their children interacted almost exclusively with middle-class friends.⁵ Ms. Carson was also the only working-class parent who reported regularly checking her children's grades using the school district's online system. She explained,

I love the fact that you can go on the computer [to see the grades], and actually, believe it or not, Jared goes on the computer almost as soon as he gets home from school, to check and see what his grade is. He'll be like: "An A-, what?" or "A 95? I thought I got 100!" Most of his grades are in the 90s. But every once in a while I'll come home and I'll be like: "An 82? What was that?" And Jared goes "I don't know. I was really tired. It was a hard test." It's like he's giving me the key that something's not working right for him. So that's when I'll, like, cut back on something, or talk to him to see if he's [having problems with friends]. I'll be like: "You're not sleeping [enough], or you're tired, or too much activity this week or something like that."

Unlike most of her working-class peers, Ms. Carson had also intervened at school with special requests. Those interventions resulted from the encouragement of her middle-class friends. Jared played baseball, basketball, and football, and during games and practices, the moms would often sit for hours and chit-chat. During one baseball game, a group of middle-class mothers instructed Ms. Carson to write a letter to the principal requesting that Jared not be placed in a particular teacher's class in fifth grade. Those same moms also encouraged Ms. Carson to ask Jared's teacher during conferences to move Jared up to the "next level" in spelling so that he would "always be challenged" (see also Lareau and Calarco 2012).

Despite those interventions, however, Ms. Carson was also different from her middle-class peers. Even in elementary school, for example, many of Jared's friends' parents were keenly focused on preparing their children for admission to "elite" colleges. Some had even considered switching to private school for middle and high school to improve their children's chances. Ms. Carson, on the other hand, expected that Jared would go to college, but she believed it would be best for him to start at

a community college and then transition to a local 4-year school. She explained,

Kristy [my oldest] did local first, community college, and then transferred to [a local four-year school]. So I'm hoping that unless Jared gets scholarships to go somewhere else, I'm hoping that he does at least one or two years local, here. Because I think it's hard when kids move away and go to school. Because I think it's hard to focus on being out in the world with all that, at the same time as trying to be growing up and going to school, because you're doing it all yourself. And I think that, this way if he lives at home and still goes to classes, he can just take his time a little bit with it. I think it would just be easier for him to just go to the local community college, take the regular courses that he's going to have to take anyway. Especially in the first two years, it's all the same. And hopefully it'll be something that can be transferred. And then get him a little job, so that you know, you gotta get your car, and everything else. It's just such a hard world. And for him to run right out and start having to do his laundry, and go get his own food, and then still meet the classes. I think he doesn't have to do that right away. But if he wants to [go further away], it's fine. I just think that it would be nice if he went slower.

Jared was one of the top achievers in the grade, athletically talented, socially savvy, and potentially an ideal candidate for an elite college. However, Ms. Carson wanted him to take the "slower" track, going to community college first and then on to a 4-year degree.

Ms. Carson also differed from middle-class parents at Maplewood in the emphasis she placed on good character traits such as respect, responsibility, and hard work. As she explained in an interview after Jared's fifth-grade year,

Jared has always been more of an adult kid. And that's why all his teachers like him a lot. Because he knows when the teacher's annoyed, and he'll, like, he'll know when business is business. He'll get up and move himself out of a situation [when other kids are acting out], and then the [other] kids will come over and [start acting out again] and he's like: "No, look—she's not in the mood for this kind of stuff. I don't want to get in trouble." And he'll get up and move himself again and be like: "I'm gonna do my work."

Ms. Carson expected her son to respect his teachers and avoid situations where he might get in trouble. Unlike her middle-class peers, Ms. Carson also did not openly encourage Jared to use his teachers as resources or to try to advocate for himself at school:

I try to have [my kids] rely on their classmates for questions and help with stuff, because they're in class with you, hearing the same thing you are. Turn to the friends, and ask the friends about the writing project, or the homework for that night, or whatever.

Like other working-class parents, Ms. Carson wanted Jared to respect his teachers and to tackle problems on his own, or at least rely on friends—and not teachers—as his primary resource.

Ms. Carson's mix of middle-class and working-class parenting styles seemed to leave Jared with a flexible attitude toward both strategies of influence and strategies of deference. He recognized that support-seeking had both benefits and drawbacks. During a math lesson, for example, the students had just learned a new set of geometry formulas, and they were supposed to be working independently on practice problems. Many of the students were struggling, and a few, including Jared's best friend Aidan (middle-class, white), got up to ask for help:

Aidan pushes his chair back hard away from his desk. Grabbing his math notebook, Aidan marches up to Mr. Potter's desk. Aidan explains that he is confused about one of the problems. Mr. Potter nods and moves toward the chalkboard at the front of the room, motioning for Aidan to follow. As Aidan and Mr. Potter work through the practice problem together on the board, Jared glances up from his own notebook. Jared sits silently for a moment, watching Aidan and Mr. Potter. Then, slowly and quietly, Jared gets up from his seat, picks up his math notebook and his pencil, and tiptoes up toward the front of the room. Rather than go up to Aidan and Mr. Potter, however, Jared hangs back, about ten feet behind them. Jared listens intently as Mr. Potter explains the practice problems to Aidan and diagrams them on the board. Jared also copies their work into his own notebook. Then, before Mr. Potter and Aidan even notice that he has gotten up, Jared tiptoes back to his desk, slides into his chair, and continues with the rest of the problems.

Compared to other working-class students, Jared often seemed more comfortable interacting with teachers and voicing his needs. At the same time, and as this example highlights, Jared seemed to retain a working-class wariness of the potential drawbacks of seeking support in the wrong way.

Unlike his middle-class friends, Jared also viewed overreliance on teachers as antithetical to hard work, respect, and personal responsibility. During another math class, for example, Jared even went so far as to poke fun at middle-class students who were anxiously asking questions about a challenging word problem on a test. The problem read

Elise is shopping at the store. She has one \$20 bill, one \$10 bill, and three \$1 bills. Make an organized list that shows all of the different amounts that Elise could pay and receive no change.

That problem created significant consternation for the students. During the test, 12 of the 17 middle-class students raised their hands, called out, or

went over to Mr. Potter (in some cases repeatedly) with questions. Neither of the 2 working-class students (Jared and Amelia) did so. Eventually, Mr. Potter stopped the test, called for everyone's attention, and explained the "shopping" problem aloud. Despite that explanation, however, a number of middle-class students were still confused:

Josh (middle-class, white) calls out loudly: "So you don't need to use all the bills?" Mr. Potter nods quickly, pointing at Josh and saying: "Right!" Alan (middle-class, Asian American) then jumps, asking: "So, how many combinations do we have to make?" Mr. Potter laughs: "That's what you have to tell me!" Hearing that, Aidan (middle-class, white) follows up: "Do we tell you the number of combinations, or which ones?" Mr. Potter sighs and glances at the clock, as though he is growing impatient. He taps on the test sheet in his hands, indicating the instructions, as he explains: "Which ones, in an organized list." Finally, Julie (middle-class, white) pipes up, calling out: "Can we, like, use half the ten?" Mr. Potter scoffs, almost incredulous: "No!" Julie lets out a dramatic sigh. Jared, meanwhile, hears this and sits up eagerly, a sly grin on his face. He turns to Ben (middle-class, white), who is sitting next to him, and asks with a sarcastic sneer: "Can we, like, cross out the ten and write five instead?" Jared says this loud enough for the whole class to hear. Mr. Potter and a few of the students (including Julie) giggle appreciatively at Jared's joke.

Jared seemed to recognize that Mr. Potter was growing tired of the stream of questions. With his quick comedic timing, Jared also sensed that mocking the absurdity of Julie's question would be sure to get a laugh. On a deeper level, Jared's joke also seemed to reveal a skepticism of or even a disdain for his middle-class classmates' constant requests.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter describes how the parents at Maplewood coached their children to manage problems in class-based ways.⁶ In general, middle-class parents taught their children to practice strategies of influence—using teachers as resources, being assertive in making requests, and avoiding consequences for missteps. Working-class parents, on the other hand, taught their children to practice strategies of deference—respecting authority, working hard to overcome problems on their own, and taking responsibility for their actions. Of course, there were variations. Some middle-class parents, especially the parents of shy and high-achieving students, had to be more dogged in their efforts to get children to use strategies of influence. Other parents, especially those who were upwardly mobile, took a more ambivalent approach.

This chapter also describes how the children at Maplewood came to internalize the lessons their parents taught them at home. Interviews conducted at the end of fifth grade revealed marked similarities between parents and children in their response to hypothetical classroom challenges. In those same interviews, children were also able to recall numerous incidents in which they had used their parents' coaching to guide them in managing problems at school. Taken together, such findings suggest that parents' messages were indeed getting through. That internalization process, however, was far from automatic. In some cases, particularly with shy and high-achieving middle-class students, children resisted their parents' lessons, prompting frustration and often further coaching on the part of parents. Furthermore, and even without such overt pushback, it often took time and repeated coaching for children to gradually adopt the strategies their parents taught them at home. When it came to children's classroom behavior, for example, and as discussed in more detail in Chapters 3–5, patterns of influence and deference were more pronounced in fourth and fifth grade than they were in third grade.

The findings in this chapter add nuance to our understanding of the relationship between culture and inequality. Research on cultural capital often treats stratification as the product of cultural matching (Bourdieu 1996; Lareau and Weininger 2003; Stephens et al. 2012).⁷ From that perspective, the middle class gains advantages by complying with the expectations of dominant institutions. Given that premise, we might assume that middle-class parents would teach their children to comply with teachers' expectations in school. However, that was not what I found. At Maplewood, it was the working-class parents who placed the larger emphasis on compliance (deference). The middle-class parents taught their children to expect teachers to comply with their requests, including those exceeding what was fair or required (influence). Rather than align themselves with institutional standards, it seems that middle-class children tried—and learned at a very young age—to set the standards instead. Although subsequent chapters explore the success of those efforts, this chapter provides compelling evidence of the strategies linking middle-class culture to larger patterns of inequality. By teaching strategies of influence, middle-class parents may help their children learn to negotiate additional advantages in school.⁸

By showing how those strategies are passed from one generation to the next, this chapter also deepens our understanding of the processes that link socialization and stratification. We know that middle-class parents frequently intervene on their children's behalf (Brantlinger 2003; Cucchiara 2013; Horvat et al. 2003; Lareau 2000, 2011; Lewis and Diamond 2015; Useem 1992). Those interventions can create real advantages for children, but unless middle-class parents also teach their children to create their

own advantages, the cycle stops there. As demonstrated in this chapter, the middle-class parents at Maplewood did just that—they taught their children the strategies of influence that (they hoped, at least) would lead to success in school.

That is not to say, however, that working-class parents were unconcerned about their children's success or that they were taking a hands-off approach to parenting. On the contrary, the working-class parents at Maplewood worked diligently and deliberately to provide advantages for their children—even moving to Maplewood specifically to give their children access to better schools—and to help their children create advantages for themselves. They just did so in a very different way, one based on different priorities—good character over good grades—and different assumptions about the kinds of skills and strategies—deference over influence—needed to achieve their goal of success in the “real world.”⁹

The point of this chapter is not to explain why middle-class and working-class parents coached their children to manage problems in different ways. However, existing research does offer some tentative evidence in that regard. Parents' lessons, for example, might reflect social class differences in their experiences interacting with teachers, employers, and other institutional authorities. It is known, for example, that schools often treat working-class families as second-class citizens (Cucchiara 2013; Lareau and Horvat 1999; Lewis and Diamond 2015) and that such treatment influences parents' educational orientations (Lewis-McCoy 2014). It is also known that middle- and working-class jobs offer workers different levels of status and authority (Lamont 1992, 2009; Rivera 2010) and that those differences are closely linked to parents' values for their children (Bourdieu 1990; Bronfenbrenner 1958; Kohn 1969). Those differences in parents' experiences may also have led parents to prioritize different goals in coaching their children to manage challenges in school. According to resistance theory, for example, working-class families reject the dominant culture's emphasis on academic success (and define success in terms of character instead) as a way to protect their own self-worth from the possibility of failure (Bettie 2014; MacLeod 1995; McRobbie 2000; Willis 1977).

Consistent with those possibilities, I found at least some evidence that parents were drawing on their own class-based experiences to shape their parenting decisions. Middle-class parents, for example, often recalled how strategies of influence benefitted them in college and in the workplace—recall Ms. Matthews' comment that if an employee is confused about an assignment and fails to ask for clarification, he or she will likely get fired. Interestingly, I found that working-class parents were more likely to refer back to experiences in elementary or secondary school rather than in the workforce—recall Mr. Graham's comment

about how the teacher yelled at him and made him cry for “challenging her” by asking a question. That may have reflected the fact that working-class parents had experienced more negative treatment from teachers when they were in school and thus anticipated that their children would experience the same. Another possibility, however, is that working-class parents spent less time at Maplewood than did middle-class parents, and they were thus less able to see how schools and teachers and their expectations had changed over time. Future research should explore these possibilities in more depth, but my evidence seems to provide at least tentative support for the latter. In line with that view, I found that middle-class parents could all readily describe actual incidents in which asking for help or clarification or reprieve had benefitted their child. Working-class parents, meanwhile, had difficulty recalling incidents, at least at Maplewood, in which seeking support from the school led to a negative outcome. Furthermore, the few working-class parents who had sought such support (e.g., Ms. Higgins and Ms. Carson) generally had very positive things to say about that experience. In summary, it seems that although parents’ class-based coaching may have reflected differences in the treatment that parents received from teachers and other institutional authorities, it did not appear to result from differences in how teachers at Maplewood responded to middle-class and working-class parents who approached them with requests for support.

Teachers did, however, play a critical role in determining whether strategies of influence and deference generated the outcomes that children and parents desired. As Chapter 2 demonstrates, teachers had expectations for student problem-solving, and those expectations shaped how teachers responded to students’ problem-solving strategies. Those expectations, however, and in contrast to what research on cultural capital and the hidden curriculum might predict, were not fixed. Rather, teachers’ expectations for student problem-solving varied from activity to activity and even moment to moment throughout the school day. Those ambiguities led children to rely on their parents’ coaching in deciding how best to proceed. Thus, as discussed in Chapter 2, teachers were instrumental both in prompting children to activate the class-based strategies they learned at home and in determining whether those strategies resulted in reprimands or rewards.

CHAPTER 2

The Inconsistent Curriculum

Mr. Cherlin’s fourth graders had recently finished a unit on astronomy. After lunch, as the students settled back into their seats, Mr. Cherlin reminded them to clear their desks and take out a pencil for their end-of-unit test. After passing out the tests, Mr. Cherlin read the directions out loud, going through each section (definitions, multiple choice, and short answer) one by one. After each section, he paused and asked the students if there were “any questions.” The students just stared back at him silently—no one called out or raised their hand.

During the test, however, a number of students became confused about what they were supposed to do. Mr. Cherlin was circling around and glancing over students’ shoulders as they worked. As he did so, a few students (all middle class) asked for clarification about specific questions on the test. Middle-class student Jamie, for example, looked up at Mr. Cherlin as he passed and whispered, “Do we need to draw the moon phases or just write what they’re called?” Mr. Cherlin patiently answered these questions, smiling and calmly reassuring students about how to proceed. After approximately 5 minutes of circling around, Mr. Cherlin returned to his desk, where he began typing on his laptop. The students, meanwhile, continued to work silently on their own.

When the students finished their tests, they were supposed to drop their tests in the “inbox” and pick up a worksheet with science-themed riddles. The riddles, however, were not easy, prompting some students (again, all middle class) to call out for help:

About half of the students are still working on the test. A few of the students who are finished start calling out to Mr. Cherlin with questions about the riddle worksheet. Liam (middle-class, white) declares loudly: “I don’t get this!” Michelle (middle-class,