Beating the Odds

High Schools as Communities of Commitment

JACQUELINE ANCESS

Foreword by Linda Darling-Hammond

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willingness of community members to make their beliefs and their practice public and open to scrutiny; the willingness to hold themselves accountable for the alignment between their promises, their practices, and their results; the willingness to collaborate, negotiate, and tolerate the enduring tensions of living and working with others; and the willingness to embrace individual and collective responsibility—that is, the steadfast belief that, regardless of circumstances, it is always the faculty and the school's responsibility to commit and recommit themselves to finding the way to get their students to learn.

Schools organized to be communities of commitment can unite the individuals who comprise the school so that the school is a cohesive organization, so that the divisions between individuals and their school dissolve, so that the individuals who comprise the school are in fact their school. By organizing a school to be a community of commitment, the boundaries between faculty and their school can become permeable—new ground can be broken, new entry points opened, and new pathways crossed. Faculty and students can become the school. There can be a fusion, a connection, a bonding where school is not just a place where people spend time. Then there can be more than buy-in. There can be exchange, attachment, and bonding among people with their work, their school, and the young people's futures.

Caring Relationships: The Main Thing

"Caring is the main thing. You can't get educational until you get personal."

—a student

"This place hurts my spirit," says a high school student in *Voices from the Inside: A Report on Schooling from Inside the Classroom* (Institute for Education in Transformation, 1992, p. 11), an intensive study of four diverse schools in southern California.

Human relationships, the report goes on to explain:

> May be one of the two most central issues in solving the crisis inside schools. . . . Relationships dominated all participant discussions about issues of schooling in the U.S. . . . Relationships between students and teachers seem to dominate students' feelings about school. . . . Students, over and over again, raised the issue of care. (pp. 13, 19)

The long reach and powerful grasp of caring relationships in schools is well documented in close to 70 years of education research. Darling-Hammond (1997), McLaughlin (1994), Lee, Bryk, & Smith (1993), and Waller (1932) found that teacher-student affective bonds influence students' motivation and engagement and make schools more humane and better places to learn. Meier (1995) reports that close teacher-student relationships allow teachers to demand more of students "without being insensitive or humiliating" (p. 111). Eccles et al. (1993) found that supportive teacher-student relationships are particularly important for low-performing students. Wehlage et al. (1989) found that

schools that functioned as communities of support, teachers' relationships with students could be a source of social capital. Teachers, Wehlage et al. explain, could help students at risk of dropping out to recover themselves and "rebuild the social bonds that tie students to adults and the norms of the school" (p. 25). In other words, relationships are a source of potential newfound school success. Newmann & Associates (1996) report that adult relationships also benefit schools and student achievement. They claim that schools characterized by a strong professional community in which adults have cooperative and collaborative relationships, focused on instruction, benefit student performance.

In schools that are communities of commitment, caring relationships, rather than regulations, are the organizational building blocks, the pathways for communicating and enacting commitments; that is, beliefs, values, goals, and promises. Because commitment inheres in caring relationships—indeed, caring relationships are often considered a condition for commitment—they are central to the operation of schools. What do powerful, caring student-teacher and professional relationships look like in schools that are communities of commitment? What characterizes them? How do they work? How do schools make them happen and support them? How are they used to leverage student achievement? How do they influence values that inform how teachers define their role? How are they a source for collective action that can benefit the goals and commitments of individuals and the school community, or how do they nurture and how are they a source of social capital? The exploration of these questions is the focus of this chapter. A snapshot of relationships at work at Hodgson Vocational Technical High School begins our exploration.

A SNAPSHOT OF A POWERFUL RELATIONSHIP

Standing in front of an audience of 25 family members, friends, and teachers, the high school principal and district superintendent, and a national network TV reporter, Stanley, Hodgson baseball team's stocky, 18-year-old star batter and catcher began to weep. Dressed in a Victorian morning suit, striped tie, high hat, spats, and patent leather shoes, Stanley, along with two peers, had just successfully completed a 1 ½-hour oral presentation and defense on the architecture and construction of a 3/4-scale model Edwardian, shingle-style house that his team

had constructed. Not only had the team designed and executed the construction of the model; they had researched it, written reports on it, and responded to questions from a committee of teachers who sought evidence of the depth of their knowledge and understanding on the architecture and construction of Edwardian shingle-style houses.

Struggling to compose himself, Stanley searched his pockets for a handkerchief, dabbed his cheeks dry, made several unsuccessful attempts to lift his head and clear his throat, and then in a breaking voice described to his audience the journey that took him to this celebratory day. Injured earlier in the year and left unable to play for most of the championship season, Stanley, who was never an ambitious student, had sunk into silence and depression. He explained:

> When I came back from the hospital, I was having a lot of trouble with my project. I was having a lot of trouble with everything. I was having a lot of trouble mentally with different things going through my head. I had thoughts I couldn't tell no one. Very terrible, terrible thoughts.

Again, as emotion overcame him, his broad chest heaved and tears streamed down his face. Taking a deep breath, he paused and tried to collect himself. Struggling to keep his chin up and his eyes dry, he mumbled, "Terrible. Couldn't tell no one. Terrible."

Warm rays of sun bounced off the backs of white metal chairs, neatly arranged in three rows on a broad stretch of freshly cut, spring-green grass just outside Hodgson's carpentry shop. Here Stanley's audience sat anxiously transfixed on this May afternoon. Looking directly at Special Education English teacher Carolyn Steinwedel and Carpentry Shop teacher Dave Lutz, both evaluators of his project, Stanley said, "Without these two people, I wouldn't be standing here." Some of those listening later whispered about the comment's ominous innuendo. After handing flowers first to Steinwedel and then Lutz, along with gifts students traditionally give to their teachers after such presentations, Stanley hugged each of them tightly and lingered in their embraces. Steinwedel sobbed and was soon joined by another tearful colleague, Darnell Grandell, chair of the Mathematics Department and also Stanley's teacher.

Earlier, Lutz and Steinwedel had confided their struggle, frustration, and perseverance in getting Stanley through the school's Senior

Project. At no point until the presentation was completed were Lutz and Steinwedel sure that Stanley would transcend his depression and resistance to complete the project. Lutz explained:

> Stanley has not pulled his weight throughout this. He [has] just now at exhibition time decided to take this seriously and he's frustrated. When he busted his arm, he felt sorry for himself. He stopped working. On everything! I had in-your-face confrontations with him. I told him he had to stop feeling sorry for himself and do the project. It went on and on like this!

At the final rehearsal only a couple of hours before the presentation, Lutz instructed the three boys to practice, but Stanley was missing his index cards with the prompts for his part. They were with his friend who had left the school to buy the flowers Stanley would present to his teachers. Nonetheless, an exasperated Lutz insisted they practice their presentation. The boys proceeded with their rehearsal, which was punctuated with tension as Stanley forgot the sequence of his parts and threw off his partners, requiring them all to regroup regularly. From time to time, the boys glanced beseechingly at Lutz who stood steadfast, his arms folded across his chest, and relentlessly demanded that they complete their rehearsal. After several adjustments, but none too happily, they did.

Steinwedel explained that Stanley was so late submitting the research paper required for the Senior Project, that his English teacher refused to even consider accepting it, which meant he would automatically receive a failing grade. Despite Steinwedel's efforts at negotiation, Stanley's English teacher contended that to accept his paper at such a late date after she had supported him through several extensions would violate her standards and be unfair to other students. Unless he completed the research report, he would not be allowed to work on the Edwardian house or perform the oral presentation. Completing the house and presenting it publicly were important to him. And, if he received high enough grades on the construction of the house and on the oral presentation, which required him to synthesize learnings from his research and construction, he could still pass the project. Nonetheless, it was a risk. He would have to complete the research paper knowing that a failing grade was a foregone conclusion, and even if he could get beyond his resentment about the automatic failure, Stanley was not con-

fident that he had the capacity to complete it. He might put in the effort and get no return.

Stanley was dejected. Steinwedel decided to guide (read push) him through the completion of the research paper. And with her support, he completed it. Helped by the coordinated efforts of Lutz, Steinwedel, and a third teacher, all of whom comprised the committee charged to guide him through the Senior Project, Stanley passed.

THE NATURE OF CARING RELATIONSHIPS IN A SCHOOL SETTING

Stanley's story illuminates the nature of student-teacher relationships in schools that are communities of commitment. These relationships are characterized by strong, caring ties that are analogous to family bonds. Stanley's situation shows how these close, family-like bonds can be transformative. That is, they can play a critical role in changing individuals' possibilities, as they did in Stanley's case, where what could have easily been a failure became a success. These relationships can be transcendent, and in being transcendent they can leverage social and personal development and academic achievement, as occurred in Stanley's case. Stanley's relationships with Lutz and Steinwedel helped him assert personal discipline to transcend himself and a troubling time in his life that otherwise might have resulted in school and perhaps personal failure. Through these relationships Stanley was able to complete a significant task—the Senior Project. He was also able to achieve personal and school community goals—his desire to complete the construction of the Edwardian house and his school's desire to successfully academically challenge vocational education students.

Students-and-faculty relationships at the Urban Academy and International High School also demonstrate caring and family-like bonds that have the power to leverage student achievement. Indeed, Academy students' comments suggest that caring relationships may be the single most powerful variable in turning around those who have not succeeded. "Caring," explained one student, "is the main thing. You can't get educational until you get personal." Another commented, "It changes things a lot when teachers care about you."

Another remarked, "Caring is what makes us want to go to school every day."

At UA, remarked teacher Nancy Jachim, "Every kid is grabbed by some adult. No one is unconnected." UA codirector Herb Mack pointed out that the school's small size of 120 enables students to make their own attachments to adults. On occasions when students and faculty have not made attachments on their own, Mack, whom students regard as a surrogate father, reaches out personally to help them connect or at staff meetings seeks out those faculty members who think they have a rapport with the students in question.

When students are without a family, UA faculty members have become their advocates and negotiated social services as needed. They have secured homes for students who have had none, medical care for students who are ill, and financial aid for students who have had none. They intervene when students who live in group homes have problems. They assist with bail arrangements when students get into trouble with the law.

Like family members, they keep tabs on graduates who have no family. They see them on holidays. If they are away at a college, they phone them. UA codirector Ann Cook regularly sends them care packages of food. She and others negotiate with their college financial aid officers to secure adequate financial aid packages. Troy, a graduate whose mother died while he was enrolled at UA, regularly returns to tell his former teachers how he is doing. During one visit, he explained, "UA is as close and important as my regular family. [UA teachers] inspired me to do a lot."

Cook, Social Studies teacher Avram Barlowe, and Math teacher Wally Warshawsky commented that they and their colleagues take on the role of surrogate family because no one else is available to take care of the students and they refuse not to respond to their circumstances. As Warshawsky sees it, the faculty's role as surrogate family serves the school's educational commitments:

> A lot of kids have a lot of problems and you help them fix their problems, but in some cases you have to fix it for them because it's out of their hands. Such as when a kid who has no place to live—you can't just do nothing about it. You have to try to figure out a place so that the kid can be someplace so that they can function. If they have specific medical problems, you have to be able to do something about it. They may not be able to, whereas we know better because we're adults, and we know the ropes of how to get stuff done, and

we have connections that they don't have. So there are those kinds of areas. You have to look at it from the point of view of how we can make them take more control of their lives in the academic area which is what we're supposed to be doing, mainly; but not just that because sometimes if they can't take some control of their lives in the nonacademic areas, it's going to affect the academic area also.

At International High School caring relationships help students transcend the isolation of language barriers, the loneliness of family separations, and the fears of being in a strange culture. Students described their relationships with teachers in terms of family. Teachers are "second parents" or "older friends" to whom they can turn when they need help. Many make reference to their teachers' concern for their physical and emotional well-being. One student commented, "I will not forget the teachers help me in my need."

International's principal, Eric Nadelstern, explained that "Every kid connects to at least one adult." Approximately one third of International's faculty members, explained Nadelstern, volunteer to become surrogate family to students who are separated from their biological families. On major holidays, these teachers have taken students to their homes to make sure they have a sense of family. Elio, a graduate of International, recalled an episode when Nadelstern had acted as his surrogate parent. Elio's parents, having remained in their native country, were not available for his report card conferences with his teachers; nor were other relatives. When Nadelstern discovered Elio alone on Parent-Teacher Conference Day, he went to each class with Elio, introducing himself as his guardian and discussing all of his grades with the teachers.

Across the schools intimate, trusting relationships and teacher persistence in response to student resistance are powerful levers for students' social and personal development and academic achievement. I now discuss the nature and operation of relationships in schools that are communities of commitment.

Intimacy

By intimacy, I mean that teachers know students well. They know them as individuals. They know what is happening in their lives, socially and at home. They know students as learners in their class and in the

classes of their colleagues. Charles, a Hodgson plumbing student, remarked: "All the teachers know me in the school. Mr. Allen knows where I live, how I live, what's my last name, what's my middle name, how old I am, my telephone number. He knows everything about me."

Being known as an individual and as a student, being named, and being acknowledged are very important to students. One Urban Academy student said, "Everybody knows your name. They say hello to you. You interact with people."

Another stated, "Here [at UA] you're a person. You're somebody here."

Another commented, "There's more personalized attention here—teachers know you and you know them."

Another explained, "[Teachers] take a personal interest in you. That makes school a whole different experience."

As this student's remark reveals, being known, naming names, strengthens the connections among individuals and with the school as a community: "If something happens here, everyone talks about it; they mention names."

Across the schools, being known creates a safety net that makes it difficult for students to fall through the cracks. The safety net is at work in Stanley's relationships as Lutz and Steinwedel use their knowledge of Stanley's personal circumstances and his needs as a learner to support him to perform and to direct their actions.

An Urban Academy student explained, "If you're not here you're missed. Your home is called."

Another commented, "They do what they have to do to keep kids in school. If I need to get up early, they'll call me."

Another explained, "At UA they try to help you. Talk to you. Try to see what you're good at. They work with your weak points."

At Hodgson, Kathy, a dental lab student, said:

> Teachers are more one-on-one with the kids. At other schools the [assistant] principals just know you if you get into trouble. In Hodgson [assistant] principals come up to you and ask you how you're doing and all. [They] know the kids more.

International High School Math and Science teacher Simon Cohen asserts that teachers' opportunities to know students well is their primary

and most effective strategy for supporting and monitoring students: "The most effective thing is basically every teacher knows every student, basically knows where every student belongs all the time, has a relationship with each student." He contends that teachers use their knowledge of students to leverage achievement.

Teachers' knowledge of students enables them to develop effective instructional interventions. At Hodgson, one student explained, "When I needed help the teachers knew because I wasn't trying. They would sit there and talk to me." Teachers could apply an intervention that was likely to succeed because they had the knowledge to accurately interpret this student's behavior.

Several International students mentioned that teachers know just when they will need extra learning support, because at those times teachers rewrite text material in "simple English," make photocopies of materials from their own personal books, and give them examples to increase their understanding. Several students imagined teachers spending "nights and days doing work for them," especially on text revisions. Teachers were not, as one student asserted, merely teaching "from the book, which we can't understand that much of."

Hodgson Math teacher Robert Rhies described how conversations and personal interactions with students over time led him to change both his math curriculum and teaching practice from the lecture/memorizing algorithms method to a problem-solving, activity-based method designed to help students understand the theories behind the algorithms:

> I asked my [Math] students, "When did you stop liking school?"
> They kept saying, "When teachers began to lecture." I had the desire to make the [math] material more interesting for the kids. . . . I wanted to increase students' interest in math because if they are more interested, they will pursue math after school.

Opportunities for teachers to know students well can also evoke a deep understanding and acceptance of students as adolescents, as it does in Lutz and Steinwedel's responses to Stanley. They treat his behavior as an opportunity to help him mature by structuring occasions for him to take responsibility rather than as reasons to punish him for his irre-

sponsibility and resistance. Lutz insists that Stanley rehearse for his presentation, even without his cue cards, and Steinwedel insists that he complete his research paper even though it cannot achieve a passing grade. The relationship makes them more than content instructors; it makes them adults helping youngsters learn and practice habits necessary for successful adulthood in their community.

Opportunities for knowing students well also strengthen teachers' attachments and commitment to students, as Hodgson's Dale Derrickson, who teaches machine maintenance technology (repair and maintenance of machines, mechanical equipment, and plumbing, electrical, heating, and air-conditioning systems), explains:

> We get to spend a lot of time with [our students] and really
> get to know them. It really helps a lot. . . . We see a lot of
> personal growth. . . . We get to know them so well; we don't
> have that indifference. Once you get to know the students
> you care about them more.

Trust

At the foundation of relationships between teachers and students is trust. As students explain, trust means that teachers can be counted on to be accessible, accepting, and helpful with students' personal, social, and educational needs. One student at UA explained, "There is always a teacher to help you with your problems, whether they are academic or personal."

Another said, "I know if I need someone, there will be someone there for me."

Another remarked, "I'm sure every teacher in this school has had some kid go to them, like cry their eyes out, whether it be about school or anything else."

At International, Ana, a Peruvian tenth grader, remarked: "You can trust people."

Christina, a Polish student, agreed: "We can trust the teachers. Is comfortable to talk to them." She explained that when students are ill, teachers inquire after them.

Other students mentioned how teachers encouraged them to express their anxieties and concerns. Typical is Vietnamese student Phan Nam's comment, which reveals his faith in teachers to help him:

> "Like, 'You scared?' They'll ask you, 'Tell us what happened. Someone
> bother you? You fail the test?' So they can solve the problem. They
> gonna give you the good advice."

When Hodgson students need help, they go to their empathetic teachers and administrators. Charles remarked:

> [We] got [assistant] principals and teachers here that we can
> talk to. They can understand us and put things together.
> They can adjust themselves in our shoes and know how we
> feel about the situation and whether they can do something
> about it. We have communication here.

Mary, a cosmetology student, explained that "Teachers say, 'If you have a problem, come to me when you want to.'"

Richard, a Hodgson Visual Communication Arts major, explained:

> Ms. Piretti [Visual Communications Shop teacher], you can
> talk to her and she'll find something for you. She'll make
> sure you know what's going on and which direction you're
> going in. You don't even need guidance counselors if you
> ask me.

Earl, a Culinary Arts student, commented: "If you're a failure, you know that they have people to help you. For example, when I speak to Mr. Grandell [Math teacher], he sits down and explains it until you know what you are doing."

Travis (a Cosmetology major) said:

> Talking to my teachers really helped me. All of the teachers
> have helped me. None of the teachers here let me down.
> They got me to play football and I played for four years.
> Now I'm gonna go to college. I got a little scholarship.

Students can count on their teachers because the schools give the teachers the authority and autonomy to be accountable. The schools deem their teachers trustworthy. Teachers can and do make decisions based on their professional judgment as it maps against the mission and values of the school and the goals of the students. Students assert that teachers can be trusted because they make sufficient time for access to

them. Students measure teachers' commitment by the time teachers devote to them. Typical are comments such as this one by Mary: "For the most part, teachers give up their time to help you out."

Similarly, Kelly, a Culinary student, said, "What helps is that teachers give you their time. They're willing to stay after school and lunch period."

Steinwedel explained that teachers intentionally communicate their accessibility to students:

> We present ourselves in such a way to let the students know we're very open to what they have to do. I think they know that they can come in here and shut the door and scream every now and then and we're not going to hold it against them.

Hodgson's principal Steve Godowsky is not only accessible to students; he makes them his top priority.

At the Urban Academy students trust teachers to accept with good humor their adolescent contradictions manifest in their sometimes regressive and dependent behavior, which is publicly displayed in their sometimes satirical cartoons and caricatures of staff members that capture the essence of their appearance and teaching style, but primarily in 10 years of cajoling, demanding, pleading, rebuking, and humorous notes to codirector Mack, all of which paper the 25-by-15-foot wall adjacent to his desk. Typical are these:

> Dear Herb, I hate you. Love, _____.
>
> Dear Herb, I would just like to let you know that I *would* have handed in my "Issues" paper, if I could. You see, as I was attempting to pick it up this morning, it jumped off my desk and bit my toe. Then it hid under my bed. Once I catch it, I'll bring it in. I would just like to let you know that I have to lure it out with lots of white-out and a pen, which in my room are hard to find.
>
> We need paper towels in the girls' bathroom, Herb. Get them!
>
> Herb Law: Thou shalt not be late; Thou shalt always do your work . . . .
>
> Don't ask "why" unless you have 45 minutes.

> Hey Herb, i'll [sic] pay you a quarter if you finish grading my *late* paper. (Posthaste). I need to go to college!!!
>
> Herb, My first Note to you! It's a *complaint*! Ha thought you get off easy, Huh!! I like the fish candies, so fillem up! Now!
>
> Herb—call my dad! Before I kill him!

This sampling of notes indicates the degree of affection, attachment, and trust students have for their principal, enough to make demands on him, to have expectations of him to be responsive in all areas of their lives, and to make these expectations public and in a petulant and familiar tone that transgresses the conventional boundaries of authority that typically define student-teacher and student-principal relationships. The school's public display of these symbols of faculty-student relationships signifies the staff commitment to and trust in the students and their school.

Student Resistance and Teacher Persistence

As in Stanley's relationship with Lutz and Steinwedel, teacher persistence in response to student resistance is common in the relationships between teachers and students at the Urban Academy and International High School. Across schools, student resistance manifests itself in multiple forums: students find ways to avoid challenging educational tasks, habits of work, and social obligations. Stanley "forgets" his cue cards for the rehearsal of his presentation, he is late in completing his English research paper despite several extensions, and his negative attitude and continuously disappointing behavior frustrate his peers and teachers. Godowsky and several Hodgson teachers report that the majority of Hodgson students choose the school thinking that they can avoid academics. One Social Studies teacher explained:

> When I informed my ninth graders the third week of September that we had a heavy-duty writing program and that's what they were sticking to, they told me flat out that they came here so they wouldn't have to do academic work.

At International, students were in the habit of making private bargains with themselves to get low grades or incompletes in some courses, usually those more challenging, while devoting greater effort to courses

where they felt more confident. Many resist using English, preferring to communicate in their native language. They express ambivalence about the interdependence and social responsibility required for collaborative group work, the pedagogy at the core of International's instructional program.

At the Urban Academy, especially where students have had numerous unsuccessful school experiences, many have a long history of resistance. Almost all have difficulty submitting work on time. Many have never read a book to completion. Most are used to making very little investment in their schoolwork and are satisfied with perfunctory efforts. Their time management, organization, and work-study skills are poor.

Despite this, in each of the schools, teachers meet students' resistance by persisting in their demands for quality performance, coupling them with the support students need to attain it. Teachers' unrelenting persistence is evidence of their commitment to their students and to their school's educational mission. Many students describe teachers' persistence as "push." Typical are these comments by Hodgson students:

> [Teachers] push you. If you start drifting, they'll get right on your case. They'll push you, push you, and push you until you get up. I wasn't too good in any of my subjects and then when I came to this school, as soon as I sat down in class, they said, "Well, we're gonna expect a lot from you in this class." And from there on, they just push you and push you.

Another remarked: "[The teachers] really expect a lot from you. . . . and they have people to help you."

The process of teachers and students developing bonds and connecting and establishing common ground is itself a lever for improving learning and achievement, as one student notes:

> When I first came here [as a ninth grader], I didn't care about nothing. I learned about communication. Once you sit down and talk to one of these teachers about how they feel, how they want you to do, [you] can turn out as a straight A student. They'll tell you that they've been there before and they know that you're human, too. They want some A's, too. They know where we're coming from when we say that we

can't do a certain problem because they've been there before themselves. And since they made it, they're gonna make it sure enough so that we can make it, too.

Often students tearfully explain that they "would not have made it" without particular teachers, that their teachers never gave up on them, and that they never believed in themselves until they saw the persistence of their teachers' belief in them. Teacher persistence, as a Hodgson special education student suggests, can be particularly significant where students are fragile:

> Without Mr. Coleman [a Special Education assistant] I would not have passed because I kept on saying, "I'm gonna give up. I'm gonna give up." But I didn't. And then I did my presentation and I got a 92. I would never think I could do that because I kept saying, "I'm not gonna do it."
> I was gonna quit school. I was supposed to graduate last year. But with Mr. Coleman's "Julia, you can do it," I stayed in school. . . . [Mr. Coleman] came to my shop and asked if I needed help. He was on my committee. I could go to him any time I needed.

Recalling Stanley's story, his teachers persist in their demands and support for his performance by not letting him fall through the cracks by dropping out. They increase their attention. They sustain their high expectations for his performance by creating opportunities and structures that deliberately push him through obstacles until he completes the requisite tasks, and they use their relationship as needed. Lutz is in Stanley's face. He insists on rehearsal even though Stanley is unprepared, even though Stanley has habitually fallen short. Steinwedel advocates on Stanley's behalf and then devotes the time and attention he needs to complete his English research paper.

Over and over, Stanley's teachers make the option of disengagement and failure difficult for him to choose. Instead he is confronted by demands for responsiveness and responsibility by teachers who are responsive to his needs and who take responsibility for helping him through his task. Teachers' use of committed and trusting relationships and their persistence despite Stanley's resistance mitigates the educational risks inherent in the tasks Stanley needs to complete and keep him

from totally abandoning them. The teachers make it harder to fail than succeed.

Similarities abound at the Urban Academy. "Human Sexuality" teacher Gail Lemelbaum describes the nature of teacher persistence there:

It's the punch and stroke method. We have nudge and nag and punch and stroke: "You better get that homework done. I'm really sick of this. What is this! You can do this!" Then, "I really miss it when you don't turn your work in." It's demanding a lot and at the same time being very understanding.

Students' stories of their relationships with teachers reveal the "nudge and nag and punch and stroke" nature of teacher persistence, students' resistance, their capitulation to teacher demands, and their understanding of teachers' commitment to their achievement. Whitney, who was a chronic cutter in her former elite NYC high school, explains:

[Teachers] want you to do your work; so if you have problems, they'll be like, "Well, I really want you to get this done." And if they see you need a little more motivation, they'll say, "Come, sit down."

You're like, "No. I gotta go."

"Hey, sit down. You have to get this done. This is what you have to do." They'll sit down and talk with you. Make sure you get it in your head.

You can't get out of it because I have not once gotten out of having to do anything. Never. The teachers will try to help you do better. They will try to bring your standard up. You can try for as high as you can go.

Kathleen, who had attended parochial schools prior to enrolling at UA, stated: "If you have a problem, if you need tutoring, or if you need some extra help with something, [teachers] will be on your back all the time until you sit down with them and actually talk. You know they'll be there."

Mary-Grace, who enrolled at UA after having been expelled from Catholic school because she refused to remove pierced ornaments

from her tongue, eyebrow, chin, and nose, described how teachers "nudge":

[The teachers] sit down with you and help you, like, "What's the problem? What don't you understand? Let me help you. Let me rephrase it. Let me talk to you in a different way." You know, anything that can help you get into this work and help you understand it in a different way.

Although UA effectively pushes students to increase their productivity, teachers need to be sensitive to the fragility of their achievements. English teacher Rachel Wyatt explains:

[Teachers will say] "Can we be flexible at this end to create some way for you to get it done?" So the kid's always an active partner in these things, but you can still feel minute-to-minute frustration.

Successfully pushing students, Lemelbaum points out, can present teachers and schools with an enduring dilemma, redolent of that confronted by Stanley's English teacher: "How do we hold kids responsible for meeting standards and wanting to provide them with unlimited opportunities?" As teachers' experiences in the three schools reveal, a blanket policy is not an adequate response to this dilemma. Faculty need to have the authority to make decisions on the merits of the individual situation so that decisions are guided by individual students' learning needs for the present as well as for their future and the school's needs to sustain its credibility as an effective learning community. Where there is strong commitment to both students and the school community, faculty can be trusted to make balanced decisions in the interests of both the individual and the community as they do in the International team meeting and on Stanley's Senior Project.

At International, teacher persistence has led to and been supported by organizational changes generated by the faculty. Teachers' commitment to increasing students' performance levels and reducing opportunities for them to compromise their performance in particular courses contributed to the faculty's decision to restructure the school into self-contained, interdisciplinary clusters of 100 students and 5 or 6 teachers, whereby teachers could know a cohort well and work together closely to monitor and support them. The self-contained cluster structure enables

cluster teachers to meet together with students about whose perform-
ance they are concerned and collaboratively problem-solve. Meetings
between an individual student and all of his or her teachers can be very
powerful. Together teachers and the student confront patterns of behav-
ior and performance that are unproductive and problematic and
construct a strategy for improvement that builds on the strengths of
teachers and the student. As clusters behave like a small community,
converging on the issues of particular students, falling through the cracks
becomes more difficult for students. School data revealed that immedi-
ately after the implementation of this cluster organization,
International's course pass rate increased by 5%.

In response to students' ambivalence about collaborative group
work, International's teachers take the time to explain the reasoning
undergirding the school's commitment to it. Teachers hope that their
explanations will increase students' understanding, engagement, and
cooperation with their demands and diminish their anxieties. When
some students in Dina Heisler's Humanities class objected to collabora-
tive work groups, she discussed her and the school's rationale with indi-
vidual and small groups of students:

> They asked, "Why is it important to learn their work in a
> group?" [I discussed with them] the fact that for the rest
> of their lives they're going to be in one kind of group or
> another. Collaborative learning provides students with
> opportunities to learn how to resolve interpersonal conflicts
> in the context of a team, what it means to honor a contract,
> and what the dilemmas of leadership are.

Students' comments suggest that teachers' responsiveness and
respect expand their capacity for tolerating their ambivalence and the
trade-offs and ambiguities inherent in collaboration and finding ways to
be productive individually and as members of a group. One student stat-
ed, "The best and the worst moments were working in groups."

Another explained,

> When the people are placed in groups, they would work as
> hard as they can in order to get a good grade so that they
> should care not only for themselves, but as well as the others
> and do well. That's when everything would work out, but
> sometimes it depends on the people.

Another said:

> I always found out that some people know something that I
> don't know, and I can tell them what they can't do. We learn
> from each other. There is nobody who knows everything
> best [sic] than somebody else. Once people feel important,
> that they could be helpers, then they open up and talk. First
> they are very scared.

Another remarked:

> Sometimes, I don't really like [the groups] because not
> everyone's equal, not everyone knows as much. Sometimes
> the people who know more have to put the project together
> and the rest of the people don't do it as well. And the peo-
> ple, they're not so happy about it. That's one thing that I
> don't like about the groups.

Steve Lindberg, Social Studies and Math teacher, believes that stu-
dents' resistance occurs because they don't have the knowledge and
skills necessary to collaborate effectively and because their prior learn-
ing environments devalued collaborative behavior. Therefore, asserts
Lindberg, it becomes the school's responsibility to teach those skills nec-
essary for effective collaboration. The opportunity for teachers and stu-
dents to have close relationships facilitates ongoing, respectful commu-
nication where both can be responsive to the concerns of each other and
where teachers can adjust their pedagogy to respond to students' anxi-
eties without compromising the pedagogical principles of their school.

Teacher persistence in response to student resistance is so perva-
sive in the three schools that they could each be said to have a culture
of teacher persistence. What I mean by a culture of teacher persistence
is that persistence as a teacher response to student resistance to educa-
tional challenge is not isolated, idiosyncratic, or serendipitous, in which
case it would be available only to those students lucky enough to be in
the classes of particular teachers. Rather, teacher persistence in response
to student resistance is a norm of professional practice; it is an expecta-
tion for all teachers and is evoked not necessarily by the personal ethos
of individual teachers, but by the mission and value system of the
schools, which in this instance envision themselves as caring learning
communities committed to developing students intellectually and

preparing them for their future either in the workplace or at postsecondary institutions. This vision and commitment set a context for schoolwide expectations for teacher roles and behavior, which in these cases means that teachers hold themselves accountable for eliciting student learning and achievement. Since that requires persistence, they hold themselves, individually and collectively, accountable for persistence. International High School Social Studies teacher Aaron Listhaus expresses this ethos:

> We view a student's failure as our own failure, recognizing that there are some problems we can't solve. But generally we need to support all of our students so that they do pass and move on. . . . Whatever we think is going to work is what we'll do.

The value that each school's culture places on teacher persistence is evident in the status that individual acts of persistence convey upon teachers and by rituals that celebrate persistence. While teachers do not walk around announcing or asserting their persistence, they invariably regale or one-up each other (or any willing listener) with commentary on or tales of student resistance countered by their "heroic" efforts of persistence and perseverance and ultimately conquest as resistance surrenders and triumphant students accept challenging projects. The story of Stanley is typical. But so is this gleefully related comment of Dental Lab teacher Al Angel: "We drag students through the Senior Project kicking and screaming!"

There is this Senior Project tale told by Hodgson English chair MaryAn Scarbrough:

> [The student] and I and the shop teacher sat down and I said, "Okay, now you tell him—the shop teacher—what you're going to do for your product in shop. What are you going to make?" Because we had talked about what he was going to research.
> And he said, "This is what I want to do."
> And the shop teacher said, "Too easy."
> And the kid said, "Well, okay, *this* is what I'll do."
> And the shop teacher said, "Nope. Too easy."
> So the kid said, "What would you like me to do?"
> The shop teacher said, "This is what I'd like you to do."
> And the kid said, "Well, that's hard."

> And both the shop teacher and I said, "Yes. But it's doable, isn't it?"
> The kid said, "Yeah. I could do it if I really put my mind to it."
> That's what we want. (Ancess & Darling-Hammond, 1994, p. 9)

Teaching in these instances includes expanding students' learning ambitions.

Embedded in the culture of teacher persistence is the normalization of student resistance. When the faculty can regard student resistance as normative rather than as pathological or as willful disobedience or a deeply rooted character flaw, it becomes just one of the variables in the school constellation that factors into how education is organized and delivered for high levels of achievement. Resistance is understood in an educational context and planned for. At the Urban Academy, Social Studies teacher Avram Barlowe explains that teachers understand and accept the fact that if they persist in their demands for students to meet personal and academic challenges, they also have to "tolerate their regressions."

UA's Nancy Jachim contends that if schools expect students to embrace their priorities, they need to embrace their students' priorities and to be responsive to their developmental needs:

> The school's priority is academic; the students' is usually social and emotional. Kids want to be loved, thought of as beautiful—their agenda is to be cared for. Teachers want them to learn academics.

To International's Charlie Glassman, who has argued that the school's job is to support students to mature, immaturity is normative.

One Hodgson Social Studies teacher says: "Many of our students are very undermotivated to achieve academically. They really don't care and so they sell themselves short."

Maintenance Technology teacher Dale Derrickson agrees and explains how teachers adapt their teaching so students can transcend their resistance:

> I think some of these students are just turned off to school. They haven't felt interested or successful. A lot are very

intelligent kids. It's just that the way they've been taught in the past is not the way they learn. A lot of these kids don't see in the abstract. They're learners that actually want to apply what they're doing. Give them something concrete, then it starts to make a lot more sense to them.

These are not criticisms of students or characterizations of deficiencies. Rather, they are statements of fact, descriptions of how students are, information that is useful for teaching and learning. These publicly acknowledged understandings and perspectives of student resistance strengthen teachers' commitment and the school's commitment to persist in the face of resistance in no small part because these ways of understanding, of interpreting students' behavior, protect teachers, individually and collectively, from feeling rejected, fatigued, and defeated. Because these ways of understanding student behavior are embedded in and emerge from the school culture, the school as a community and the school's commitments to its vision and its students are also protected from the assault that student resistance can be and the negative culture of failure and blame that often results.

LEVERAGING RELATIONSHIPS FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

In each of the schools there are norms of practice for using relationships to leverage students' social development and intellectual achievement. Relationships are not used for the purposes of hanging out, paling around, or excusing poor performance. Rather, relationships are a pedagogical tool that enables teachers to care not only about their students but also about their students' learning. This use of relationships requires diffuse roles for teachers. Teachers at Hodgson, International, and the Urban Academy take on a variety of roles, functioning as instructors, advisors, confidantes, advocates, tutors, facilitators, mediators, and surrogate family. Such diffuse roles provide teachers with multiple opportunities and entry points to establish close, caring, and trusting relationships that enable them to know students well—both as students and as people—from diverse perspectives, and use that knowledge and their relationship to provide students with personal attention and influence their behavior.

Undergirding the schools' expectations for teachers to adopt diffuse roles is the assumption that teachers individually and collectively, and teachers' professional judgment, are trustworthy. These are not schools designed to be teacher proof. Rather, these schools depend on teachers. Teachers are not saddled with regulations or narrow and rigidly defined role descriptions that obstruct and conflict with their professional judgment and the interventions they may deem appropriate. Furthermore, teachers' collaborative work structure provides safeguards for their judgments. Teachers work with a set of trusted colleagues in a community of practice, in which they receive feedback on their judgments. As in Stanley's case, when school policies are learner-centered and flexible, and acknowledge the complexities of the learning context, there is room for teachers to respect one another's differences in judgment without feeling that they are betraying students' best interests or their own or the school's standards of practice. Both Stanley's English teacher and Steinwedel can feel confident in the appropriateness of their different judgments regarding his predicament without sacrifice to him.

Relationships also serve the important function of helping teachers to obtain access to students. Access unlocks information that enables teachers to help students in both the personal and academic spheres and to push students beyond self-imposed limits to leverage progress and achievement.

In order to support the use of relationships as levers for student development and achievement, schools need to be organized to function as communities driven by a set of commitments to particular goals and values, where there is time and there are structures for individuals to make attachments. This means that teachers and students must be able to have easy, regular, planned, and unplanned access to one another. Such access keeps teachers up to date on students and makes possible as well as encourages "just-in-time" interventions. Such access facilitates the function of relationships as an important tool to negotiate Lemelbaum's enduring dilemma: "how to hold kids responsible for meeting standards and wanting to provide them with unlimited opportunities."

This dilemma finds resolution in Steinwedel's strategy for Stanley to complete his Senior Project research paper when he can no longer receive credit for it. She is able to use her relationship with him to negotiate its completion because Hodgson's grading policy permits students to pass the Senior Project even if their research paper has received a fail-

ing grade–so long as they have completed the research paper. This policy creates openings for interventions, such as relationships, that can mediate students' performance.

All three schools provide multiple opportunities in their structures, schedules, curriculum, instruction, and assessment for formal and informal interactions between students and teachers and for regular and easy access. At International and Hodgson, interdisciplinary teaching and learning clusters, in which a constant group of teachers shares a constant group of students in contiguous classrooms, assure frequent and easy access and formal and informal and planned and unplanned interactions between staff and students. The proximity of students and cluster teachers and the flow of cluster teachers in and out of each other's rooms increase the possibilities for engagement. Teachers assert that this structure encourages them to follow up on students. Performance assessments at each of the schools bring students and teachers together to plan and execute projects and oral presentations by which their achievement in different disciplines and their readiness for graduation is judged.

Each of the schools acknowledges the importance of chemistry in the formation of personal attachment. At the smaller International and UA, teachers and students can either make their own attachments or principals can facilitate them. At the larger Hodgson, students select the teachers for their Senior Project committees and orchestrate their use with as much ease as their committee members oversee their progress. According to faculty and students, this process of self-selecting relationships encourages frequent and informal interaction, increasing opportunities for teacher responsiveness and timely and effective interventions that impact student performance.

Supporting relationships in each school are advisories or advisory-like mechanisms that link a small group of students with a single faculty member whose role it is to know the students well personally and to know their overall progress. Teacher advisors follow up on assignments required for students' courses, help them organize their work and meet deadlines, provide tutoring, and comfort them. They are the primary link to students' other teachers and reinforce their demands. Advisories also provide a forum for students to be visible, assert their voice, and be heard. Some advisories pair students with teachers to whom they already have close attachments–coaches and sports team members, for instance–so that even relationships that are not inherently academic can nonetheless be harnessed to support academic achievement. Advisories

meet regularly, usually once or twice weekly. Some stay together through the students' time at their school. Some are multigrade, with a portion of students graduating out and others entering as they enroll in the school.

Each of the schools also schedules regular time for teaching teams to meet, plan, share information, and strategize to support students. Teachers harvest their relationships with students at meetings with colleagues for the goal of academic progress. Additionally, the structure of instruction reinforces the power of relationships to leverage student progress. The relational interaction required for the Senior Project influences the actions of both Stanley and his teachers. Similarly, the teaching arrangements at International and the Urban Academy, where small groups of teachers share the same set of students, ensure the regular and ongoing contact necessary for strong relationships. As teachers explain, they see students all of the time, working in their own and their colleagues' classes and socializing with their peers.

These organizational arrangements increase the power of relationships to bring coherence to the schools' efforts to be cohesive educational communities that can effectively pursue their goals and promote higher levels of student achievement. They formalize the interpersonal responsibility that inheres in relationships and thereby strengthen the schools' internal, face-to-face accountability.

RELATIONSHIPS AS A SOURCE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

Because the bureaucratic values of hierarchy and efficiency inform the structure and culture of schools, schools are conventionally organized as though relationships are not only unimportant and irrelevant, but an obstacle to efficient operation. However, as Hodgson, International, and Urban Academy demonstrate, relationships can powerfully affect individual students and their teachers, and as a systemic value and strategy, they can affect the school's collective capacity to influence students' social development and intellectual achievement. Students at the three schools comment on how well their teachers know them and how that knowledge is used to help their educational performance. Teachers' remarks about schoolwide practice, such as Lemelbaum's description of "nudge and nag, punch and stroke" pedagogy, allude to the collective impact of relationships.

The intentional and systemic organization of the school community for the purposes of individuals working solo and collectively to use relationships to produce improvements in student performance makes relationships a powerful source of social capital. Social capital refers to the collective capacity of members of a community to cooperatively produce mutually beneficial outcomes (Coleman, 1988). Social capital inheres in the relationships. Because relationships are the predominant agent for generating social capital, for bonding students to teachers, their school's vision, mission, and belief system, they are a powerful force for schools that aim to be communities of commitment.

Social capital has its roots in economic theory, which asserts that relationships developed in the workplace affect the work and are instruments for economic ends as well as the establishment of trust, expectations, and the development and enforcement of norms (Baker, 1983), which, as Coleman points out, affect productivity (1988). In a sociological context, Coleman identifies three forms of social capital: "(1) obligations and expectations which depend on trustworthiness of the social environment, (2) information flow [and] (3) norms. . . ." (1988, p. 119).

Because relationships can affect the establishment of trust and expectations, the development and enforcement of norms, the work and productivity of teachers and students, and the operation of schools, they can function as a source of social capital. We see that at Hodgson, International, and Urban Academy. Teachers' trustworthiness facilitates students' reliance on them, which contributes to stronger student performance. Close, trusting relationships between teachers and students strengthens students' capacity to tackle their resistance to school expectations. Relationships characterized by the interaction of demands and supports strengthen a sense of mutual obligation between teachers and students. Despite the tensions evoked by teachers' persistent demands, students struggle to meet their school's expectations, and the relationships endure strain without breaking up.

The frequent and mutual access that teachers and students have provides teachers with a powerful and current "information flow" on how students are doing. As International's Cohen points out, teachers' most effective pedagogical tool is the capability of knowing students well. Teachers have up-to-date information on students' responses to their school's demands, with opportunities to be responsive and apply appropriate and timely interventions that support the school's expectations for students' learning and productivity. At International, teachers

have ongoing conversations with students in order to support the values and activities of collaboration. They create additional learning experiences to help students meet the expectations for collaborative group work.

At the Urban Academy teachers use their relationships to demand and support resistant students to complete their assignments. At Hodgson, teachers use their relationships to strengthen students' confidence so that they endure the struggle of challenging academic tasks. At all three schools, relationships are integral to the schoolwide productivity norms. Teachers continuously apply interventions to help students surmount obstacles to their performance.

In each of the schools, norms for supporting and promoting student achievement are evident in the characteristics that define teacher-student relationships. Teachers are available. They take students' accounts of their problems seriously. They respond to students' personal and academic problems. They persist in efforts to help students personally and to meet school educational obligations. Students are intentionally connected to school adults with whom they have a rapport. The relationships are used for the achievement of students' expectations and the school's expectations for them. There are also opportunities and support for students to transcend self-imposed personal and educational limits.

Social capital theory applied to schools suggests that relationships can be instruments for the achievement of educational goals, what Coleman (1988) and Wehlage (1993) explain as human capital, the knowledge and skills people derive from formal education that allows them to lead productive and purposeful lives. Indeed, without the social capital, assert Coleman (1988) and Wehlage (1993), children cannot have access to human capital or the knowledge and skills that schools are expected to provide for students' future as productive citizens in society.

These assertions suggest that schools must be able to generate social capital in order to perform their educational mission. The dependency of student learning and achievement on relationships illuminates the connection between human and social capital. Relationships in each of the schools urge and support students emotionally and academically to perform at higher levels. Achievement also relies on relationships as most vividly illustrated in Stanley's story, but also in the testimony of students such as one at the Urban Academy who

explains that teachers and schools "have to get personal" before students will "get educational."

Fred Newmann, too, points to the connection between caring and trustworthy relationships between children and adults and students' social and intellectual development: "Emotional bonding to adults in the community who nurture trust, hope, and the self-confidence [are] needed to develop intellectual and social competence" (1993, p. 2). According to Newmann, "social capital is grounded in adults with the commitment, competence, and resources to care for children" (1993, p. 2). These adults, as human resources, can be considered social capital when they "are used to enable individual and collective growth" (Newmann, 1993, p. 2). This dynamic of continuous growth that inheres in relationships strengthens the school as a community of commitment, because the growth itself, which is assessed against the school's educational goals, validates and is a manifestation of the school's commitments.

At Hodgson, International, and Urban Academy adults individually and collectively care for students academically as instructors and personally as surrogate parents. The schools provide the resources for caring relationships and teacher commitment in multiple ways. They enact organizational structures–such as small size–which facilitate attachments, interdisciplinary clusters that increase the opportunities for teachers know students well and to have close relationships, and scheduling and spatial arrangements that enable students and teachers to have easy and unplanned access to one another. They establish mechanisms such as advisories, which formalize the use of relationships. They construct diffuse roles for teachers, which enables them to know students well from different perspectives; and they promote values such as personalization and teacher persistence.

Students' moving testimony across the three schools emphasizes the connection between their individual relationships with school adults and their individual growth. Stanley's powerful confession, that without his teachers–without those committed, enduring persistent relationships–he would not have been celebrating an educational and personal victory, mirrors Coleman's observation that social capital makes "possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible" (1988, p. 98). When relationships are a systemic tool for student achievement, they can be used to powerful and equitable effect, and students need not be victims of the luck of their draw.

CONCLUSION

Individually and collectively, relationships have a powerful impact on a school's capacity to influence students' social and academic development and indeed, their lives. This chapter illuminates the ways in which students' relationships with their teachers are personally important to students, how they impact their performance and development, how teachers use relationships for educational purposes, how schools organize themselves to use relationships as a predominant educational strategy, and how relationships are a resource for student and school community development and performance. The adoption of relationships as a formal educational strategy requires reconceptualizing, reorganizing, and broadening the traditional notions of the high school teachers' role, which is usually limited to that of specialized content disseminator. In order to utilize the potential of relationships as a resource, schools need to reconfigure themselves, no longer as bureaucracies but instead as communities, communities that are defined and driven by educational commitments. Relationships tap into the most compelling human need to be known and to be connected, to have attachments, to be cared for, and to count. By responding to this need in the context of educational goals, schools can honor their commitment to the social and intellectual development of their students and increase students' investment in and commitment to their own education and future.