1. I used to believe that the learning competencies that have brought me this far in life were a product of my own self-discipline and innate qualities. However, upon further observation it becomes evident that these traits were not unlearned but, conversely, cultivated through family socialization and employment of capital.   
   A good learning habit, one of my strongest learning competencies, is something that was entrenched in me during my childhood by my mother. From around the age of 3 up until middle school, my mother strictly regulated my lifestyle to be orderly and consistent. She monitored my movement throughout the day and made sure that I went to sleep, woke up, and ate meals at the same time every day. She also made me study soon after waking up for about 2 hours every morning and maintained this regimen even during long vacations when other children would typically fall into an inconsistent and unorthodox life pattern. The upkeeping of this firm, uncompromising lifestyle was what taught me how to exercise self-control and study regularly. It also improved my concentration and trained me to concentrate on my studies for long durations of time in school and outside of school, an educational merit that was not typical among students of my age. What made this whole process possible was my family’s abundance of economic capital which allowed my mother to stay at home and dedicate all her time to her children, as well as the cultural capital of my mother embodied in her own well organized and orderly personality.   
   My acquisition of another major learning competency, an eagerness to learn, was facilitated by a wide array of factors influencing me through two channels: parental encouragement and teacher expectations. Since as long as I can remember, my house has been filled with a surplus of books, books which in my early years I was prompted to pick up and read by my parents. Every time I read a book and shared it with my parents, I would be met with high praise and even more encouragement to continue reading. This positive reinforcement and approval from my parents became my sole motivation for reading books. As I continued to read, the new information I encountered nurtured my intellectual curiosity and contributed to fostering an eagerness to learn new things. It wasn’t just my parents who kindled my eagerness to learn through positive encouragement, but my teachers as well. My teachers in elementary school all had high expectations for my academic achievement and constantly encouraged me to challenge myself and go beyond content covered in class. They gave me special resources to pursue in my own time and always expected me to excel, praising me when I met their expectations and expressing concern and support when I fell short. This kind of active intervention by the teachers gave me a sense of obligation to engage in academics and obtain high grades, feeding into my eagerness to learn and better myself. The high teacher expectations were formed on the basis of my cultural and social capital, both of which I had inherited from my parents. As I mentioned before, my knowledge of culture and orderliness were instilled in me by my mother’s parenting and the books I was exposed to at home. My social capital was something I picked up watching my father work and accompanying him on company outings. Since before grade school, my father brought me along to his company parties and outings and have me meet and talk to his colleagues. There, I learned how to speak politely and respectfully in formal terms, and also picked up how to negotiate with authority. These experiences helped me impress my teachers, leading them to form high expectations for my academic achievement.
2. In all stages of school that I went through, my learning competencies positively impacted my academic achievement and were highly praised by teachers. My good learning habit enabled me to always be ahead of the class and maintain a high score on exams. My eagerness to learn inspired me to show initiative in learning and ask a lot of questions. In addition, my ability to learn how to learn allowed a degree of independence in my educational pursuits and kept me from being dependent on school and teachers for my education. All of these competencies were conducive to improving my performance on tests and schoolwork, earning me an advantage in meritocratic evaluation. Furthermore, these competencies put me at an advantage in informal contexts within school by impressing teachers and contributing to high teacher expectations.
3. When I was around 10 years old my parents controlled almost all aspects of my life. They were selective of the friends that I spent my time with and frequently expressed disapproval of my association with certain people from school, using their social connections with other parents to monitor my activities within school and ensure that I spent time and hung out with children that they had preapproved. They also frequently visited the school and although they did not directly solicit partial treatment from the teachers, by socializing with teachers and manipulating their impression of our family they were subliminally influencing teachers to treat me with favoritism. Outside of school my parents had a curfew and expected me to come home at a certain time every day to work on homework and extracurricular studying. My lifestyle was orderly and also strictly controlled by my parents. Most of my time outside of school was spent inside my house because my mother required me to notify her one week in advance for any kind of excursion with friends or any activity that wasn’t a part of my daily routine, effectively hampering me from hanging out with friends since none of my 10 year old friends had the foresight to plan weeks ahead. When I was inside the house, my parents would focus their attention on me and attempt to hold deep conversations with me about school and life in general. They became upset if I failed to respond to their questions, and their corrective punishment would consist of forced reflection and admission of guilt.   
   All of these are characteristic of concerted cultivation, but my parents pride themselves on their “hands-off” parenting style and like to believe that they leave me to my own volition and abstain from intervening in my life. However, the only time they leave me without intervening is when I am in perfect compliance with their plans and visions for my development, and when I deviate from the laid-out path, they respond violently and authoritatively to put me back on course. When I was in middle school, my parents caught me breaking curfew and going out drinking. For a whole month after that they confiscated my phone, locked me in my room and refused to cook me meals, emphasizing my dependency on them to survive and the absolute necessity for obedience. When I was in my late years of high school, I expressed to my parents that I did not want to attend university, and instead wanted to pursue a different way of life. They proceeded to harshly reprimand me for such an absurd idea, threatened to sever all lifelines and pecuniary support if I chose that path, and rendered such a course of action realistically impossible. When I finally conceded to going to university, they chose the universities I was going to apply for and initially refused to pay for my application for Waseda and Keio because these schools did not meet their high standards of acceptable education. In college, they strongly pushed me to challenge myself by applying for the GLFP program and SPSE honor’s program. I am currently on both programs due to my parent’s encouragement and manipulation.   
   My parent’s attitude towards parenting have been consistent with the middle-class tradition of concerted cultivation. My position today is a product of the unapologetically bourgeois environment I was raised in.
4. I grew up in an unusual bicultural environment with a father who did not understand the Japanese language or the culture and a mother who spoke English but never lived outside of Japan and therefore was alien to western culture. This disparity in background between my mother and father eliminated all commonality between them in terms of cultural norms/shared values. They did not share a common frame of reference. What this did to our language was, it made communication via restricted code and dependency on context extremely difficult. My parents did not have any inside jokes and when they communicated with each other they had a habit of explaining all necessary information thoroughly in order to overcome cultural differences. In short, the language the employed was overwhelmingly in elaborate code, and naturally it was this elaborate code that I picked up at home. I was also constantly in a position to translate and facilitate communication between two people with different cultural backgrounds since childhood, whether it be between my parents and strangers or my friends, and gained a lot of practice using elaborate code and explaining situations to outsiders with zero prior knowledge. Occasionally, I would use restricted code with my friends by referencing shared experiences and knowledge in humorous ways. However, growing up in international school, many of us were used to using elaborate code in order to overcome cultural disparities and differences in background. Further, not many of us spent enough time together since we all lived far from school and school hours were not very long, and the nature of international school made it so that students were constantly coming and going, making it difficult to establish a common frame of reference necessary in the employment of restricted code. Therefore, it was not often that we used restricted code to communicate among ourselves.
5. I went to a high school where most of the student population came from low SES Japanese families. This meant that they spoke in mainly restricted code and their main source of humor was referencing whatever was most popular among Japanese teens at the time. Their vernacular comprised Japanese slang such as “卍” and “草” and their vocabulary depended so heavily on these undefined and highly contextual slang words that they found trouble in speaking to teachers in a formal environment and answering essay questions that required them to thoroughly explain phenomena in a matter that is objectively intelligible. They especially had difficulty with writing essays. Many of my restricted code friends simply refused to complete assignments that required extensive writing and explication in elaborate code. It was to the point where teachers avoided such assignments. Even when they did give out essays, they often presented clearly defined guidelines and formats for students to follow and evaluated depending on adherence to the format and quantity.
6. The counterculture in my hometown was supported by teenagers from low SES backgrounds living in government funded housing complexes. They were demographically diverse with both males and females but would participate in similar behavior like dyeing their hair, partaking in showy/gaudy fashion, getting piercings, etc. They spent a lot of time together in parks or riversides, smoking and drinking until late. The group had an unclear, undefined by implicitly shared criteria for conduct and a structured hierarchy. The strongest and most outspokenly rebellious students were regarded with respect and presided above the others. They orchestrated strikes against classes and skipped classes. Anyone who actively participated in school and showed an eagerness to study were looked down on by the group. Group members achieved social relevance within their group through showing their worth in different conquests such as sex and nightly outings and validation from those within the same counterculture but higher up the hierarchy. Many of these people graduated high school but did not proceed to university. Those I know from the group are now working as dancers or as trainers at gyms. (1985 words)