THE CRIME OF SILENCE:
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIOECONOMIC
STATUS AND SCHOOLING EXPERIENCES

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The Crime of Silence:
The Relationship Between Socioeconomic Status and Schooling Experiences

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ABSTRACT

Any exploration of possible relationships between socioeconomic status and the types of schooling experiences lived by students is one that is complicated at best. All those involved in the school system, both directly and indirectly, have a vested interest not only in the success of schools but also in the perceptions created in the public at large of the experiences they are creating. Schools are complex organizations with the vast array of personalities and organizational allegiances that they embody. It is with this in mind, that this researcher undertook the task of investigating any possible link between socioeconomic status and student achievement.

It should be noted directly that achievement encompasses much more than the limited scope of academic grades. Levels of extra-curricular involvement, relationships with teachers and other students, self-awareness, and citizenship are some of the ideals that true achievement must address. This study began as I, myself a teacher, wanted to explore whether socioeconomic status had an impact on the learning experiences of young adults, particularly as pertaining to teacher perceptions. The study was critical in design and employed the open-ended interview technique. In total, there were twelve students and twelve teachers interviewed for the purposes of this study.

The students in this study generally agreed that their school is a safe environment and that they are treated fairly by their teachers. Many of them stated that their school has a negative reputation in the city, but that at the same time, such a perception was largely unwarranted and was fed by popular impressions of lower socioeconomic sectors of society. The students seemed to enjoy their school experiences and most feel that a large percentage of their school population will continue their education at least beyond the high school level. At the same time, though, it appears that many of the students do not seem to question mainstream culture and its undeniable influence on curriculum and

education. They often equate achievement levels with intelligence and fail to recognize the many factors that can impact upon a student's success. The school system, and society in general, must begin to make targeted efforts to improve this situation.

The teachers who participated in this study attributed many impacts of the lower socioeconomic status home to the educational process, including, but not limited to, lower motivational levels (particularly in homework and project completion), an increase but not difference in the discipline issues, lower parental involvement (especially in terms of active school involvement and difficulties in maintaining home-school contact), as well as apparent lower levels of participation in, and commitment to, second language programming. The teachers appear to be committed to the success of their schools, not only as educational institutions, but also as a focal point of the community. At the same time however, some of the teachers failed to recognize their own perceptions of the inner city child that may hamper them in their own efforts. Feelings expressed that perhaps the home is not supportive because the desired results from the home are sometimes not being reached is presumptuous and erred. Elements of blame for the child for not wanting to 'get out' are also troublesome.

There are no easy answers to the questions posed in this study. Indeed, this researcher does not claim to have found them. But the twenty-four participants have illuminated one point: that schools are not responsible for the poverty issues with which they are faced nor do they embody the entire solution. I would suggest that schools must take more of an active role in the community by continuing in their positive efforts to make the schools available to as many students of the student body as possible. Teachers should not only begin or continue to evaluate their own perceptions of their students, and the criteria upon which they are formed, but also encourage the students, through active discussion and debate, to question the values of our society and those groups they actually do represent.

To imply or to suggest the schools are the cure to the disease of poverty is reckless and irresponsible. While to be sure they can make a more targeted effort within their means, they cannot be assigned the role of curing the far-reaching implications of

poverty. Poverty issues are affecting our children, our families and our schools. If as a society we do not make it a priority to address this issue, we will be cheating so may students with so may worthwhile stories to tell. The crime of silence.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to 'M' a former student who has unwittingly caused me to question and reevaluate my goals as a teacher as they extend far beyond the classroom to helping students improve their lives. Working with you has shown me who I want to be as a teacher and as a person. I will think of you often.

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CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Achievement has proven to be a topic of much interest and academic debate over the past decades. Questions ranging from the nature of intelligence and its relationship to success to those challenging the evaluative process have sparked considerable discussion among educators and researchers. While many would agree that learning is the main goal of education, it is unclear whether learning necessarily equals achievement (Bowles cited in Torres, 1998).

Since education is regarded as a partnership between home and school (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1994) changing demographics have exerted an influence on the role each plays in working toward academic success. Undoubtedly the nature of the typical American family has changed dramatically over the past several decades. In the United States seventy percent of mothers of school-aged children are now in the workforce, compared with thirty percent in 1960. There is no longer one dominant type of family since almost half of all marriages end in divorce. Single parent families now account for twenty-five percent of all families (double the figure in 1970). A third of all remarriages, and one out of every four children has one or more step-parents (Swap, 1993).

While poverty cuts across family type, such changes can have an impact on the number of families living in poverty. Indeed, in Newfoundland, "in many classrooms

children can be found who are ill-fed, ill-dressed, ill-nurtured, and socially and emotionally disadvantaged" which means that "if more children are living in less-than-adequate conditions, then the burden on the school system increases" (Royal Commission, 1992, p.31).

The nature of the family, specifically its socioeconomic status, is the subject of this study. This researcher will examine the extent, if any, to which this data informs the perceptions that teachers hold of their students' academic ability and behaviour. In turn, the role these perceptions exercise in approach to pedagogy will be analysed.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between a student's socioeconomic status and his or her educational experiences. This research will attempt to determine whether a student's family background and social class influence the ways in which teachers form expectations for and perceptions of disadvantaged youth. The study will explore the relationship between these teacher perceptions and the extent, if any, to which these expectations impact upon and influence teachers' pedagogical approach to education. Academic achievement, discipline strategies, as well as classroom dialogue, and language will constitute the specific basis of this analysis.

Background to the Study

Educators and educational researchers have long debated the purposes and function of schooling. Central to this debate are the concepts of equality and equal opportunity and the many implications inherent in each for the schooling process. Should education serve to address the social ills plaguing society and strive to create an equal footing for all of its members, or does it exist to maintain the status quo of the stratified nature of society? While this research does not claim to provide the solution to this question, it does argue that the particular ideology espoused by individual teachers affects their practice.

Recently school reform measures, including the implementation of school councils and a revised teacher evaluation policy, have been centred around the notion of increased accountability and common standards of education (Government of Nfld & Labrador, 1994). According to Stegemiller (1989) "with the increasing movement toward accountability in schools today, as well as an ever-increasing dropout rate, it is important for teachers to be aware of all the factors that influence student performance" (p.2). Teacher reflection and action research have a vital role to play in this endeavour since it is only through an honest assessment of one's work that it can be determined if personal biases and subjectivities influence the potential success of students (Ebutt cited in Scott & Usher, 1996; Gibson, 1986). Robinson (1994) supported this position stating that "ethnographic studies have provided strong evidence that teacher expectations influence both teacher behaviours with students and student achievement" (p.508). This is of key importance since "if teachers are to provide all of their students with an equal

opportunity for success, a working knowledge of how their expectations affect their students' performance is vital" (Stegemiller, 1989, p.2).

Questions of how knowledge is constructed and the nature of intelligence have been subjects of study in the field of education research for many years. As early as 1916 researchers such as Terman (cited in Jacoby & Glauberman, 1995) questioned if the designated 'place' of the disadvantaged or lower class was a result of their inferior intellectual ability or of their home and/or school training. These authors also cite Hernstein and Murray who used comparisons between one's IQ scores and the socioeconomic status of one's parents to predict the academic and financial futures of students. Bowles (cited in Torres, 1998) has sharp criticism for this "idea that people's economic fates are genetically determined by their brain power" and contend that it is one of the "most unkind, unfair, and untrue perceptions about our society. It is so self-serving to the rich- particularly the intellectual elite- and is so damaging and painful to the poor" (p.59). In any case, hereditarians postulate that "whatever the cause-and-effect relationship, IQ does correlate rather decidedly with socioeconomic success" (Jacoby & Glauberman, 1995, p.157).

The Coleman reports of 1966 (cited in Metz, 1998) received widespread attention in the education sphere with startling results regarding the disenfranchisement of poor students. It was widely interpreted that "the characteristics that individual children bring with them from their home and community experience are so potent that there is little that schools can do to equalize their learning. In the media, it was sometimes read as 'schools don't make a difference'" (p.7). This view meets with stark criticism from

researchers including Scarr (in Jacoby & Glauberman, 1995) who insist that "efforts to boost intellectual functioning in disadvantaged youth can deliver results" (p.244). In other words, a student's heredity does not carve in stone his or her potential for academic success. Scarr sees education as a meritocracy wherein if one completes the required work at an acceptable level success will inevitably be the result. Undoubtedly, many of the socially disadvantaged groups of society would argue with this point.

The debate is far from being resolved to be sure. This study will attempt to delineate some of the factors responsible for the perceptions that teachers form of students. At the end of the day, though, it cannot be denied that "research has shown that one of the greatest predictors of academic success is socio-economic status. ... Put simply, each child appears to get as many chances for success in school as his or her family has dollars and privileged social class" (McLaren, 1989, p.151).

Guiding Research Questions

This study is an attempt to assess what, if any, role a student's socioeconomic background plays in creating and shaping the perceptions that teachers hold of their pupils. Teachers frequently cite particular individuals as being 'good' or 'bad' students and as coming from 'good' or 'bad' families. On what basis do they form these particular views? In his study of inequalities within the educational system, Kozol (1991) explored the relationship between poor economic districts and the quality of the physical plant and resources of their school buildings. He overwhelmingly found that disadvantaged districts were plagued by a lack of required materials. A principal of a

neighbouring suburban district in which most families were upwardly mobile categorized his clientele in the following manner: "our kids come from good families and the neighbourhood is good" (Kozol, 1991, p.98). The question remains: what specifically is a 'good' family?

This research will attempt to explore how teachers themselves believe that they create expectations of students. Are their impressions based only on academic data such as IQ scores, previous grades, and assessments, or do they also possess certain preconceptions of those students who clearly do not benefit from the same resources as others? It is suggested by this researcher that knowing a student's socioeconomic status very often leads teachers to conform to popular middle class notions that these individuals will be less motivated to learn, less likely to learn a second language, will pose a discipline problem, and that their parents will be uninterested in their child's educational future (Barlow & Robertson, 1994). Risk (cited in Haller and Davis, 1981) states that the attributes of an ideal student "are derived from middle class criteria– e.g., cleanliness and non-aggressive behaviour– and hence lower socioeconomic children are perceived as being less able students than children from higher socioeconomic homes" (p.163).

This research will explore the criteria that contribute to a teacher's perceptions of and expectations for his or her students. More specifically, does a student's socioeconomic status shape the expectations a teacher has of his/her students? Furthermore, it will attempt to glean from teachers and students the ways in which these expectations affect their approach to teaching and relationships with their students. It is

further argued that a teacher's academic, disciplinary, and communicative approach may be influenced by his or her students' access to wealth and cultural capital.

Definition of Terms

Some of the terms used in this thesis are exclusive to the field of education or may be employed in a variety of contexts. The following section will outline the intended meanings of each of these terms that might otherwise be ambiguous.

Academic Achievement

A student's academic success entails much more than his or her grades recorded on a report card. In this research the term is "used to cover a number of separate, though related areas of achievement, including performance on IQ and achievement tests, school success (grades), and entrance to higher education" (Bond, 1981, p.239). In the document Adjusting the Course II (1994) the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador states that "achievement also means understanding broad concepts, ability to analyse and synthesise knowledge, ability to think critically and understanding the process involved in generating, locating and utilizing knowledge" (p.2). Achievement must entail the more tangible element of grades but in this paper will also refer to interpersonal relationships with teachers and students, level of participation in both co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, citizenship, and overall contribution to the school community. Many references will also be made to the post secondary options available to disadvantaged youth within this category.

Class

According to Entwistle (1977) it is inappropriate to define class in "raw economic terms" (p.37). He claims that this term refers to much more than simple economic wealth or a lack thereof. McLaren (1989) maintains that "class refers to the economic, social, and political relationships that govern life in a given social order" (p.171). In this paper, as also suggested by Entwistle (1977), class envelops concepts of culture, politics and access to various social groups and knowledge. It is the position of an individual or group of people in a stratified society that is based primarily on income.

Disadvantaged

The term disadvantaged, in the document <u>Our Children Our Future</u> (Royal Commission, 1992) "is often applied to families of low socioeconomic status" (p.36). The same document makes reference to the cycle of disadvantage which it characterises as a "continuing way of life where the disadvantages of one generation prevent the next from succeeding and escaping to a better way of living" (p.336). Disadvantage then refers not only to lack of financial security but also to the social and political consequences of low socioeconomic status.

Dominant Culture

Invariably, many of the educational researchers in this field make reference to the dominant culture of society most often typified by white middle class ideals. Racial

minorities and other subordinate groups find themselves having limited access to the benefits enjoyed by the dominant culture by virtue of their position. McLaren (1989) defines it as "the social practices and representations that affirm the central values, interests, and concerns of the social class in control of the material and symbolic wealth of society" (p.172).

Expectations

Three general types of teacher expectations will be considered in this study (Cooper cited in Bamburg, 1994). The three types are a) the teacher's perception of where a student is at the present moment, b) the belief a teacher has of how much academic progress a student will make over a given period of time, and c) the degree to which a teacher over- or underestimates a student's present level of performance.

Hegemony

Hegemony refers to the subordination of disadvantaged groups in which they unwittingly participate in their own oppression. According to McLaren (1989) it is a "struggle in which the powerful win the consent of those who are oppressed, with the oppressed unknowingly participating in their own oppression" (p.173). Freire (1970) concurs with this notion, referring to the varied means used to weaken the oppressed "from the repressive methods of the government bureaucracy to the forms of cultural action with which they manipulate the people by giving them the impression that they are being helped" (p.137). This concept is a significant aspect of the argument in this research that under the guise of learning for all students, the school system by its policies

further oppresses the already disadvantaged.

Inner City

The inner city area is characterised by densely populated, often deteriorating areas of the central city which are inhabited predominantly by low income people. In larger metropolitan areas the inner city is often also inhabited by a specific ethnic group but such is not a factor in this particular study.

Meritocracy

Many researchers refer to the purpose of education as encompassing either a system of meritocracy, or one used to maintain the stratified nature of society along social class lines. According to Entwistle (1977) "the meritocratic conception of equality of opportunity intimates nothing of a classless society; its aim is not classlessness, but one of giving everyone a better chance of being re-classified socially" (p.11). In a meritocracy one's chance of success is based on ability and work as opposed to financial resources.

Oppression

One of the key issues to be addressed in this research endeavour is that of oppression of subordinate groups by the more mainstream or dominant groups of society. Paulo Freire (1970), who has completed much research in this area, particularly as it pertains to education, defines oppression as " any situation in which 'A' objectively exploits 'B' or hinders his pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person" (p.40). It

is argued in this thesis that schools, whether inadvertently or otherwise, oppress students by not giving them the mechanics and skills needed to challenge their oppressors.

Socioeconomic Status

For the purposes of this paper socioeconomic status is defined as the combination of income, profession or occupation, level of education, culture, and social status in the community. It is argued that a student's socioeconomic status does in fact influence his/her school experience.

Significance of the Study

This research is intended to be useful in educational policy arenas. Particularly in an inner city school setting, assert Giroux and Shannon (1997) "academic experiences are deeply informed by social deprivation and inequality" (p.133). These authors go on to maintain that it can prove to be quite a challenge for teachers to "bridge this huge gulf between lived experience outside the school and the formal requirement of participation and achievement in the classroom" (p.133). Many aspects of their behaviour convey to disadvantaged students that their learning may be less valid, or less of a school commitment, than that of the middle class. This research is intended to provoke in educators and perhaps policy makers a critical appraisal of what it is we want our students to learn in terms of their self-worth. According to Mostern (cited in Giroux & McLaren, 1994) "the critical pedagogy is always someone who teaches from where the student is at, rather than from where the teacher is at" (p.256).

It is presumed that this research will benefit the field of education on several fronts. Primarily, as briefly mentioned, the intention of this study is to provoke in teachers a critical assessment of their own performance and the factors that contribute to a student's disillusionment with schooling. As Ashendon, Connell, Dowsett, & Kessler (in Livingstone and others, 1987) suggest "teachers' accounts of what happens in schools, and why, include very little about their own actions, or those of other teachers, or about the organisation and practices of the school. What they *do* mention a lot is the kids" (p.250). This seems to suggest that teachers assign themselves and the organisational nature of the school little accountability for why some students, and often groups of students, become disenfranchised with the whole process. It is hoped therefore that "as teachers we must face our own culpability in the reproduction of inequality in our teaching, and that we must strive to develop a pedagogy equipped to provide both intellectual and moral resistance to oppression" (McLaren, 1989, p.21). Since it is plausible that some teachers may be unaware of the impact of their attitudes and actions, it is hoped that this research will encourage educators to look more closely at the things they may be doing unwittingly to contribute to the problem.

A second benefit of this type of educational research is its policy implications. While this study is not intended to be a policy document per se, it is feasible to assume that any research findings stemming from this work could influence policy decisions and policy agendas of the future. Educational reform movements of the past decade within the province of Newfoundland and Labrador have concentrated on neighbourhood schools and making programming, such as French Immersion, music, and Accelerated

Math, more accessible to all zones and schools within the district, including those characterised by a relatively low socioeconomic background (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1994). Yet as Bowles (cited in Torres, 1998) points out, "a program of educational reform will be limited in its impact if it does not address this problem of structurally-determined power and inequalities of wealth in the economy" (p.59). It is believed that this study could have a positive impact on this process of policy development to reflect the nature and needs of society.

Finally, there is a great potential of this study to reflect needed changes in teacher education programs. Teachers need to become more sensitised to the various cultural differences of their students and how these differences become manifest in students' behaviour. Courses within the preservice program typically lack the depth and detail required to make any significant change in the preconceived notions of would-be teachers (Valenciana, 1995). In fact, as Valenciana (1995) asserts, "perhaps they should not be referred to as programs since the majority of them consist of single, short term or workshop type courses with few if any prerequisite courses" (p.11). Recognizing teacher expectations as an important influence on the success of students, post secondary institutions and teacher associations can become more cognizant of the need for increased and better teacher education in the areas of racial diversity, economic disadvantage, and other forms of oppression.

CHAPTER 2

Theoretical Review of the Literature

As part of this study it is essential to consider not only teachers and their voice on the potential role of socioeconomic status in forming their perceptions of students, but also the social, financial, economic, and political factors leading to their perceptions in the first place. While teacher expectations inevitably are influenced by race and gender, this study will focus more specifically on the effect of socioeconomic status on teacher perceptions and pedagogy.

Role of Enterprise in Education

Much of the research on education today seems to have as part of its focus the role played by the corporate sector in the educational reforms generated by the governing bodies of the day (Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Royal Commission, 1992). With current political thinking motivated by the quest for increased productivity while minimizing costs, much of the business sector is beginning to exert its influence on government to shape education to more closely reflect the skills and knowledge needed in the global business market. Many middle class neighbourhoods often enjoy corporate sponsorship of computer labs, new gym equipment, science materials, and the list goes on and on. Having much to gain by contributing to those who have the greatest potential of buying and using their products, companies have become keenly aware of the gains to be achieved through educational sponsorship. Since the greatest potential for an increased client base is from those with the most spending power, and since the community public

relations are fostered through association with the best schools, corporate businesses attach their loyalties to those from whom they have the most to gain (Barlow & Robertson, 1994).

On the other hand, particularly in inner city neighbourhoods and small rural areas, high rates of unemployment accompanied by, and perhaps caused by, low levels of education, many students find themselves with restricted access to community and business financial resources (Giroux & Shannon, 1997). Compounding the problem, many of the more affluent schools have at their disposal parent volunteers who can focus their attention exclusively on attracting big business to their school to support their latest venture. Once again disadvantaged, the lower socioeconomic areas are limited in the number of parent volunteers at their disposal since many typically work long hours for little pay and may also work on a shift basis. Arranging for home care of younger siblings may also prove to be quite a deterrent to increased parental involvement for this sector of the school population. As a consequence, according to Armor (1992) "disadvantaged students languish in deteriorating, segregated facilities with low standards, inferior and underfunded programs, and unmotivated teachers" (p.65).

With a mounting pressure exerted on the education system to provide what is needed for effective business competition with foreign markets, schools and school boards are being deluged with a great deal of pressure to succumb to not educating the child but rather producing marketable skills (Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Giroux & Shannon, 1997). Private business appears to dictate to government what it is that the school system is lacking. "Demanding reform based on the skills shortage theory takes

energy and attention away from the real problems of American schools" ... "Asking for more trained scientists and engineers evades the real problems-- the profound injustices that divide America along class and race line-- that would require fundamental reform" (Barlow & Robertson, 1994, p.59). This is a loaded concept when you consider that their interests are obviously self-serving; is education to become a skills factory where if you do not meet the grade for valuable economic growth you have no place in the education system? Kozol (1991) also fears not for those students who enjoy white middle class cultural capital, but for the disadvantaged students who have few to advocate their rights. Particularly frightening, he says, is that "market values do not favour much investment in the poorest children" (p.75).

This stands to reason considering the facts. The aim of business is to produce the most efficient product in the least amount of time at the lowest cost. Since disadvantaged children may not have the benefit of academic help at home or the financial resources to acquire a tutor, they many find themselves more dependent on the school system itself to provide for an appropriate learning environment (Royal Commission, 1992). This translates into increased costs for programming, teacher inservice and professional development, and other academic resources. Higher costs coupled with increased time commitments is a burden many businesses are encouraging government not to accept. In the words of one businessman, "no one expects these ghetto kids to go to college. Most of them are lucky if they're even literate" (Kozol, 1991, p.75). While this opinion cannot be presumed to be typical of all in the business community, its impact cannot be ignored in that the attitude is at least present if not

predominant.

Torres (1998) concurs with the findings of Kozol (1991) in saying that "there's a war against children. I mean, there's a racial and class war going on in this country in which it seems unfeasible, if not downright unproductive, to invest in children, particularly those who are black, Hispanic, and poor" (p.153). While some may feel that 'war' is a little too dramatic, it cannot be denied that there are distinct differences in funding in proportion to the needs of our various schools. Kozol (1991) stated adamantly that "equal funding for unequal needs is not equality" (p.54). If certain sectors of society demonstrate higher needs, then it would follow that more funding should be provided to enable these schools to address the inequalities faced by subordinate groups on a daily basis. To summarize, Entwistle (1977) states that "if you want equality in output, you will need inequality of input" (p.12).

The challenge faced by educators is to address the most needs with the fewest amount of dollars. It seems that a child's level of need is balanced against his/her contribution potential. Kozol (1991) articulates the process as one of questioning "How much is it worth investing in *this* child as opposed to *that* one" (p.117). Political pressure from the more affluent to recognize *their* needs often places the disadvantaged in society at a deficit as their voice may be one of the least politically influential. As one suburban legislator maintained, "we can't keep throwing money into a black hole" (p.53). A black hole indeed.

Parental Involvement

The dynamics of the relationship between parents and schools are not easily definable. The interplay of many factors must be considered in order to attempt to comprehend more fully the assumptions held by teachers regarding parental involvement as well as the barriers to their input in education. The reasons outlined in the literature will be discussed within the context of parents, families, communities, as well as schools. It is important to note that the barriers vary widely; this researcher will attempt to glean those most salient reasons from the literature. Eccles and Harold (1993) outline some of what they have determined to be the most important variables:

• the social demands on time, general health and neighbourhood resources and dangers. Since many lower class parents may be restricted by child care or rigid work commitments many are unable to contribute time to their children's education.

• parents' efficacy beliefs: "Some parents lack the educational background or skill they feel they need to interact with teachers and staff" (Aronson, 1996, p.58). This factor involves the degree to which parents feel confident to help with schoolwork. Parents with lower levels of education may feel somewhat intimidated with the new approaches of their child's school.

• parents' ethnic identity and attitude toward the school and its staff: the extent to which the parents believe the school is welcoming of their participation and how they may perceive the school to be accommodating and supporting of their ethnic and cultural differences.

• community influences: Eccles and Harold (1993) state that although "there are

families in all types of neighbourhoods that are highly involved in their children's education and schooling", families in high-risk, low-resource areas are more likely to "focus more attention on protecting their children from danger than on helping their children develop specific talents" (p.574).

While many factors, such as those previously discussed, apply to all groups of parents as a whole, though not all individuals specifically, there are other factors, including race and social class, that have a significant influence on participation levels. While neither can be deemed a definitive determinant of involvement, research does point to important patterns of behaviour relevant to this discussion.

A study conducted by the Academic Development Institute in 1990 (cited in Petersen and Warnsby, 1993) found that schools experiencing considerable difficulty appealing to parents to become involved had high concentrations of lower-class, single-parent families with large numbers of children: "they are typically on welfare, live at survival level, and are unprepared to meet the demands of society" (p.22). Lower-class parents also have a tendency to accept the school's decisions concerning their child and typically adopt a "separated view of home and school" (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997, p.15). Since many lower-class parents had less education than their middle-class counterparts, they often expressed doubts about their ability to help their children in school. Dodd (1996) found similar results in her study stating that "parents from lower socioeconomic levels revealed that they frequently had little contact with schools" (p.44).

This phenomenon can be more easily understood in the context of Maslow's

Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow maintained that human-need structures are organized in a hierarchical system whereby lower needs (namely physiological needs) are the most important, and self-actualization, the highest needs, are the weakest. Until the lower level needs are satisfied they will occupy the foremost role for these individuals (Reglin, 1993). While education may be important to these families, there may be more fundamental needs requiring their attention: "parents are concerned and interested, but may have survival problems that must be addressed first" (Jackson & Cooper, 1993, p.30). What many school officials may interpret to be a lack of initiative or interest may actually be a preoccupation with financial and security or safety issues: "parents were striving to survive and had neither the time nor skills to become deeply involved in school business. Not able to participate, many parents in this community faced disenfranchisement" (Skau, 1996, p.44).

A child's success in school is largely dependent on the acquisition of social skills and intellectual tools required for successful participation in the school environment (Bamburg, 1994). Indeed, according to Bamburg (1994), "in the eyes of many urban educators, the knowledge that so many children come from environments in which these tools and skills are not taught indicates that parents have little interest in the education of their children" (p.10).

Confronted with a lack of parental involvement and/or support (both real and perceived) in many urban schools, it is hard for educators to accept that(1) the parents of poor and minority children value education, (2) the home environments of poor and minority families may include

experiences that are conducive to student success in schools, and (3) the reluctance of many parents to become 'involved' may result more from their insecurity about interacting with school officials than from a lack of interest in their children's welfare (Bamburg, 1994, p.10).

To be sure, within the context of parental involvement there are many interpretations on exactly what 'involvement' means. With schools becoming increasingly politicized as they are faced with reform, the white middle class perspective may focus more on lobbying for change than on homework completion and academic advising. In this sense then, schools may place more importance on parental involvement from their need for a voice in the political arena. In any case, when teachers view poor and disadvantaged children and their families as the problem it is ultimately the children themselves who lose (Royal Commission, 1992; Bamburg, 1994). In an effort to avoid negative consequences for students teachers ought to critically assess their own practices and opinions to determine the extent to which they may share these same assumptions about the nature of parental involvement (Stegemiller, 1989; McLaren, 1989).

Effects of Labelling

The practice of labelling in society in general, and schools in particular, is one that leaves long lasting effects. Teachers, administrators and students have long used terms encompassing not only academic potential and achievement but also financial

status, peer groups, and social status within the school. It is not uncommon to hear comments in reference to a particular student such as 'broken home', 'good parents', 'sped', 'welfare kid', among others. Inevitably, whether intended or otherwise, these labels tend to remain for quite some time with students being keenly aware of the social and academic implications of being assigned to any particular group. Kozol (1991) referred to one school principal who was quoted as saying that "our kids come from good families and the neighbourhood is good" (p.98). The principal did not specify what exactly constitutes a 'good family', as opposed to a 'bad' one, and perhaps it isn't even important what the speaker intended. More important is what the listener heard: these kids come from better families than those of the neighbouring school and therefore are more deserving of our attention.

Singh (in Doyle, Kennedy, Ludlow, Rose, and Singh, 1994) pointed out that educators must focus not only on what is being said in the educational context, but also on those practices and labels which have long been taken for granted in our schools. Schools are embedded with contradictions and complexities that upon examination would perplex even the most favourable observer. The ways in which teachers use labels are highly influenced by the culture of their particular school. According to Likert (cited in Owens, 1991) "the main causal factors [of organizational effectiveness or ineffectiveness] are the organizational climate and the leadership behaviour which significantly affect how subordinates deal with each other individually and in work groups in order to produce the end results" (p.74). While many teachers would be quick to point out the bias inherent in the curriculum, Likert (cited in Owens, 1991) maintains

that "the crucial variable that differentiates more effective from less effective organizations is human behaviour in the organization" (p.74). It would seem then, that the biases in the curriculum are not entirely responsible for the contradictions of the system.

While in no way does this researcher intend to assume that all teachers arrive at their expectations for students in the same way, there are many similarities in the types of categories assigned to students. In his study of student interns in schools Doyle (in Doyle, Kennedy, Ludlow, Rose, and Singh, 1994) interviewed one intern who, in reference to parents, stated that "some of them are civil servants and professionals while the others are basically just welfare and unemployment cases" (p.38). His value judgment is quite clear with the term *just* carefully, though perhaps unknowingly, inserted before the category of job status. Making reference to the poor economic conditions in many rural areas of the province, the intern Rick goes on to assert that "I think if I came to work in (the city) I would be dealing with children who are probably a little more keenly interested in education than some of the children that I've dealt with" (p.38). His comments seem to suggest that those who are more financially secure and upwardly mobile have more interest in education than their lower class counterparts.

Unfortunately Rick is not alone in his assumptions. One of the teachers who participated in Kanpol's study (1994) commented that "in general, the students are from either poor or broken homes and do not come from an atmosphere that initiates academic interest" (p.63). It would seem that many educators assume that financially disadvantaged homes are inherently 'broken', implying some sort of deficiency, and do

not promote academic pursuits. As one teacher in Kanpol's study (1994) refuted however, "some staff here seem to equate the cultural and racial background with intellectual status, but there's no connection at all" (p.126). There does seem to be the presence of such an attitude though, as Emans (cited in Stegemiller, 1989) suggests, "that teachers did a poor job of forming expectations and that their predictions were based on subjective data" (p.21).

The extent to which subjectivity plays a role in a child's potential for success is noteworthy. There is much support in the literature for the findings of both Kanpol (1994) and Emans (cited in Stegemiller, 1989) that teachers do in fact have preconceived expectations of their students and that these expectations are not always formed, at least wholly, by academic credentials. Tom and his team of researchers (cited in Stegemiller, 1989) "found middle class students had higher predicted grades and future job status than lower class students" (p.21). In the same vein, Stegemiller (1989) refers to Dusek and Joseph's study in which their "meta-analysis agreed that social class and race were bases for expectations" (p.22).

For many teachers rather than having to take a critical assessment of their own contribution to the failure of the education system for some of its participants, it is much easier to lay blame on the faceless organization or the voiceless oppressed groups. Entwistle (1977) came to the conclusion that "when it comes to actually managing the educational process, middle class politicians, bureaucrats and teachers are quite incapable of acting disinterestedly in treating children as children without perceiving them as members of a particular social class" (p.45). Students do not seem to stand on

their own merit but are often preceded by notions of poverty or wealth and the inevitable connotations associated with each. "Language, like other social practices, serves particular interests. Language is used to exploit, dominate, subdue, mystify, and domesticate" (Gibson, 1986, p.173).

Student Voice

In an ideal world, the curriculum used within a particular classroom setting would reflect the cultural and social aspects of that specific group of people. More realistically though, it would seem according to researchers including Freire (cited in Freire and Shore, 1987) and Doyle (cited in Doyle, Kennedy, Ludlow, Rose and Singh, 1994) that such is perhaps not the case. Since much of the educational material used in schools is standardised across a wide playing field, often on a provincial or inter-provincial basis, policy makers and curriculum teams decide which resource material would achieve the outcomes with the greatest possible population in mind. Giroux and Shannon (1997) point out that "few examples exist of curricula sensitive to the multiplicity of economic, social and cultural factors bearing on a student's educational life" (p.240-241). Textbooks are often riddled with gender and racial bias. In this light, many of the subordinate groups within society may find few references to their specific cultural ideals and values.

One could argue that this is purely coincidental and that there are no intentions of non-inclusion in our approved resource materials. Yet as McLaren (1989) discusses, "teachers must be careful not to silence students unwittingly through hidden biases

lodged in their own pedagogical practices" (p.228). Since members of oppressed and subordinate groups tend not to be as involved in education as their more affluent counterparts (Eccles and Harold, 1993; Aronson, 1996; Petersen and Warnsby, 1993) one can assume that they also did not become actively involved in the selection of reading and other learning materials. With the more mainstream middle class population presumably having a representative voice in the selection process, it is logical, indeed probable, that they instinctively chose materials that speak to them as a group: i.e. that represent their values.

McLaren (1989) poses many questions on this issue as part of his research on inner city schools in Canada. He claims that "certain types of knowledge legitimate certain types of gender, class and racial interests" and goes on to ask "whose interests does this knowledge serve? Who gets excluded as a result? Who is marginalised?" (p.169). If their own values and experiences do not find expression in the school curricula, disadvantaged students are expected to emulate an image, which for them has little relevance and an even smaller chance of attainment. Kanpol (1994) also raises the same type of questions related to the extent that teachers may be silencing the voices of their students, and thereby negatively affecting their learning experiences, by their pedagogical practices. A critical educator, according to Kanpol (1994) should ask of him or herself: "Am I reinforcing stereotypes? Am I reproducing inequities? How can I undercut inequities? ... How does my teaching affect race, class and gender?" (p.53). It is argued by this researcher that many teachers are not in fact aware of the influence that their actions and practices have on their students. If we do not accord value to the

knowledge and voice of working class students "do we unwittingly devalue such knowledge and thereby disconfirm the voices of these students?" (McLaren, 1989, p.182).

Educators must become aware of the "institutional forces that use language to silence, exclude and dictate the voices of subordinate groups" (Giroux & Shannon, 1997, 239). While some may assert that disadvantaged children need to be exposed to the middle class culture to have any hope of joining it, they should also be exposed to their own culture and values as they are manifest in society without any particular values being proposed as the 'correct' ones. According to Freire (1970), "no pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors" (p.39). It is not a solution to silence their own culture and present as the ideal that of the white middle class society. Indeed it is of concern that if the individual's experiences do not receive validation, then is the same true for the individual himself? (Doyle cited in Doyle, Kennedy, Ludlow, Rose and Singh, 1994; Freire, 1970; Giroux & Shannon, 1997).

To be sure, the importance of student voice cannot be minimized. Classroom discourse is a valuable indicator not only of what takes place within the classroom, but also of the attitudes espoused by those participating in the learning activities. Teachers convey much of their philosophy of education and their ideologies through their conversations with students and throughout their classroom dialogue. In order to empower these subordinate groups, it is essential that teachers pay close attention to the language that they use and to the voice expressed by students (not only expressed

verbally but through actions as well) (Freire, 1970; Giroux & Shannon, 1997).

Freire (1970) goes on to assert that "propaganda, management, manipulation– all arms of domination– cannot be instruments of their rehumanization. The only effective instrument is a humanising pedagogy in which the revolutionary leadership establishes a permanent relationship of dialogue with the oppressed" (p.55). This requires a teaching professional who goes beyond the approved resource materials and who facilitates questioning of the status quo and the mainstream culture.

The ways in which teachers relate to their students reveal important attitudes that they may be unwilling to admit or even that they are unaware exist. Robinson (1994) discovered that the teachers in his study used a different type of language to converse with particular groups of students. Specifically, those students who were of subordinate or minority groups were given less acceptance of mistakes and discipline issues. As one particular teacher is correcting assigned work, the ways in which she addresses mistakes are quite enlightening. Robinson (1994) claims that "in scolding these three children, the teacher clearly discriminated in tone, and she later reported lower teacher SES expectations for Ilyoungie and Sangunie and higher expectations for Pilsokie" (p.521). In correcting the students she says "in an accusing tone, ... 'you wrote it all wrong' ... and 'you don't listen to me.' Pilsokie, in contrast, received more attention and sympathy, in a tone that was more encouraging than accusing" (p.521). Disadvantaged students, or at least those perceived to be disadvantaged, are dealt with in a manner characterised by less patience and encouragement in Robinson's study. While, as with any qualitative data, one cannot presume it to be generalisable, it does lend much insight into the area of

teacher perceptions as they are reflected in language and voice.

The expression of voice in the classroom is a significant aspect of the schooling experience. Students ought to be empowered so as to be able to find their voice in the system and be able to challenge those biases inherent in many of the instructional materials used. Because this research attempts to discover how teachers form their expectations of students, it is important to note how those participating in this study will give voice to their own mental models and ideologies.

Maintaining Standards

Under the guise of maintaining high standards of achievement many schools limit the access of the less fortunate to their various programs. While many members of society would agree that certain school districts are quite disadvantaged in their financial resources available, these same people are often unwilling to accept any of the blame for the situation, or to shoulder the responsibility of making effective change (Kozol, 1991; Ornstein & Levine, 1989). When Kozol (1991) questioned high school students in an affluent middle class neighbourhood about the fact that they enjoyed enriched programming including music education, and advanced placement courses, the advantaged students seemed to sympathise with these other schools, but yet seemed to feel that inclusion of lower class students would lead to compromising the high standards of the school. Says one particular student: "I don't doubt that the children in the Bronx are getting a bad deal. But do we want *everyone* to get a mediocre education?" (p.128).

Similarly, following discussion with parents on the same issue of providing

increased access of the lower socioeconomic classes to their school, Kozol (1991) discovered a similar attitude. Parents were not in favour of such a plan and claimed it was all in the name of standards. "The parents from Dearborn Park insist that, if the school is attended by the children from the projects- these are the children who have lived there all along- the standards of the school will fall" (p.60). It is unclear from their discourse what exactly will cause standards to fall; could it be the ensuing teacher expectations? To be sure, once that word 'standards' is used, many people put their heads in the sand to shield themselves from what they know to be true: lowered standards are often a scapegoat for fear of difference.

Teachers and community members alike also share perceptions of the academic motivations and abilities of children living in poor economic situations. In fact, as Ornstein and Levine (1989) learned in their research "based on low levels of achievement in their classrooms, many teachers in working-class schools reach the conclusion that large numbers of their students are incapable of learning" (p.20). It would seem that many teaching professionals are unaware, or choose to ignore the fact that many factors, only one of which is ability, affect academic performance. Surely parental involvement, security issues, hunger and poverty can also figure prominently in the equation of academic success. Paulo Freire's own accounts of his experiences as a child of poverty is one case in point: "I would try to read or listen in class and I could not understand any of it because I was so hungry. It was not stupidity on my part. It was not lack of interest. My social conditions did not permit me to get educated" (p.29). Whether such assumptions are the result of lack of teacher preservice and inservice

training, feelings of being overwhelmed by time constraints, a lack of energy to effect

change, or other factors will remain one aspect of this research study.

Kozol (1991), who can lend much insight into this question, found that many

students themselves also espoused these same assumptions regarding academic ability as

it relates to socioeconomic status. Referring to the implementation of a mechanics

course predominantly for lower class students, one student says, "Let's be real. Most of

us aren't going to college ... We could have used a class like this" (p.52). The students

seemed unequipped to challenge the status quo or even to be cognizant of the fact that

they were being oppressed. Kozol (1991) also interviewed a school principal who was

quick to make the distinction between the socially advantaged and those students who

were financially limited. When referring to a school lunch program offered to students

whose families were unable to provide suitable meals, he commented that "most of these

kids are in the special classes. They do not come from this neighbourhood" (p.93). It is

quite interesting how he made the connection between remedial education and lack of

funding for lunches. Could it be that in his mind-set they were interchangeable? The

fact that these kids do not belong to *this* neighbourhood is also indicative of the social

perceptions and negative connotations associated with subordinate groups.

Kanpol (1994) made similar proposals following his critical work involving

economically limited school districts. One school principal commented that since the

majority of his student body was minority (Hispanic) that these students are "vocationally

bound, and I don't know if we give them what they want" (p.97). In his statement he

does not elaborate on why he assumes the kids will not pursue post-secondary college

programs. Such an omission leads this researcher to question the wisdom of his assumption. On what basis did he make this judgment? More importantly, how does this assumption affect his leadership philosophy and the approach of the organization to learning?

Powerlessness

Undoubtedly, students must be affected to some degree or another by the expectations that teachers hold for them. Whether these effects are manifest in their classroom behaviour, academic success, motivation, involvement in extra-curricular activities or some other aspect of the school culture, students will exhibit some responsive behaviour to the expectations their teachers have of them, or at least what they may perceive to be their teachers' expectations. According to Bamburg (1994) "while it would be misleading and inaccurate to state that teacher expectations determine a student's success, the research clearly establishes that teacher expectations do play a significant role in how well and how much students learn" (p.1-2). In fact, several studies (Andrews, Soder, & Jacoby, 1986; Bamburg & Andrews, 1989) have found that schools in which the teachers consistently held very high expectations of their students were "instructionally effective inner-city schools" (Bamburg, 1994, p.3). It would seem then that there may be a positive relationship, though not necessarily a cause-and-effect relationship, between student achievement and teacher expectations. Moore and Johnson (1983) concur with these findings and state that "studies of student attainment demonstrate a direct influence of teacher expectations upon student educational

decisions and an indirect influence upon later occupational attainments" (p.460).

If we know that high expectations yield, for whatever reason, positive results, can we assume the same relationship exists for low expectations? According to Leacock (cited in Bond, 1981) "the reason many lower class children fail to achieve in school is that their teachers, consciously or unconsciously, project a basically nonsupportive attitude toward them" (p.244). Bond (1981) also cites Risk who proposes that "it is not so much the inadequacies of the children but the indifference with which they are treated that is responsible for their poor academic performance" (p.244). This research endeavour will attempt to glean from students themselves whether or not they feel as though teachers exhibit a different attitude toward students due to social class.

Given that teachers hold expectations of their students (either high or low), that these expectations will influence the children in some fashion, and that according to the research (Risk cited in Bond, 1981; Leacock cited in Bond, 1981) teachers may react with a lower expectation for lower class children, how is it that these expectations influence their pedagogy? Unfortunately, according to Valenciana (1995), teachers are not provided with adequate training in issues of diversity. There are complex factors at hand that influence the actions and attitudes of teachers that range from feelings of inadequacy to a lack of education.

Paulo Freire (1970) refers to the 'banking' approach of teaching wherein teachers believe themselves to be the primary givers of information, the expert on all that is to be taught. Students are not afforded the opportunity for discovery learning since the teacher sees knowledge as an item to be deposited to passive recipients. Disappointingly, Freire

maintains, "those who use the banking approach, knowingly or unknowingly (for there are innumerable well-intentioned bank-clerk teachers who do not realize that are serving only to dehumanize), fail to perceive that the deposits themselves contain contradictions about reality" (p.61). He would put forth, then, that teachers are unaware of the hidden curriculum in their teaching. This work is supported by others (Valenciana, 1995; Burwood, 1992) and reveals that teachers may in fact be teaching class and race bias all the while believing the curriculum to be undifferentiated.

Another explanation for the low expectations that teachers may hold for lower class students is related to issues of power. Many interns and possibly teachers may feel powerless to change factors which they believe to be beyond their control and too pervasive in the child's life to allow teachers tomake any significant difference. Popekwitz (cited in Doyle, Kennedy, Ludlow, Rose, and Singh, 1994) claims that "often interns feel they have little chance of remedying a situation that is related to complex issues of social class, cultural background, and the institutional biases of schooling" (p.49-50). Similar findings result from research by Clauset and Gaynor (1982) who assert that "it is assumed that there is little the school can do to offset the impact of pre-school, family, and environmental conditions" (p.9). Many teachers, feeling overwhelmed with their diverse job responsibilities, may feel powerless to try to change what they see as being firmly imprinted upon that child's hopes of success. Says one teacher (cited in Kozol, 1991) of her own lack of effort to encourage lower class children to focus more on their academic responsibilities "It makes no difference. Kids like these aren't going anywhere" (p.52). Obviously she does not see it within her power to effect

change.

The theme of powerlessness continues to apply not only to teachers but also to the oppressed groups themselves. Levin (cited in Torres, 1998) says that he became convinced "it was powerlessness that was at the heart of what was wrong with education, powerlessness of minorities, powerlessness of communities" (p.208). Indeed one cannot ignore the need for empowerment of students themselves concerning their education. Many disadvantaged children, confronted with societal stereotypes of who they are and what they can become, find themselves trapped in images they cannot surpass (Freire, 1970; Ornstein & Levine, 1989). Freire (1970) refers to the concept of self-depreciation wherein the child internalises the opinion that his or her oppressors hold of him or her. "So often do they hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing, and are incapable of learning anything-that they are sick, lazy, and unproductive- that in the end that become convinced of their own unfitness" (p.49).

If lower class students perceive their teachers to expect less of them than of the middle class students, they will often come to accept as truth that they are less able to achieve than their counterparts. According to Bamburg (1994) "when this internalization occurs, the student's self-concept and motivation to achieve may decline over time until the student's ability to achieve to his or her potential is damaged" (p.2). Rather than helping a child to challenge the negative stereotypes characterising his or her culture, the teacher may actually cause the student to accept that he or she is less able to succeed. "Because students are influenced by their teachers' perceptions and behaviours, low teacher expectations generate further declines in students' motivation and performance"

(Ornstein & Levine, 1989, p.20). In fact, these authors go on to point out that teachers may not only expect less of those lower class children, but "they sometimes wind up praising them for below grade work and meaningless work so as not to foster hopelessness" (p.20). The cycle of powerlessness continues to impact upon the students in negative and unproductive ways.

Surely the first step in empowering students to make changes to their situation, is to empower their teachers to be aware of their role in the cycle of oppression. Teachers can make their schools a learning organization (Senge, 1990) in which all participants of the schooling process can learn and lead toward change. No one is the expert; all members of the school community can grow to determine the changes to be made that are significant to them as a group. Bamburg (1994) comments that "if educators are truly committed to creating schools in which expectations are high for all children, then it is incumbent on them to recreate schools as learning organisations in which teachers, administrators, students, and parents work together to create the kinds of schools they desire" (p.12). A learning organisation cannot be the result of school board mandates or provincial and federal requirements. They must come from the grassroots of the membership and all participants must share in some feeling of ownership to the reform. Senge (cited in O'Neil, 1995) claims that "deep learning is a process that inevitably is driven by the learner, not by someone else" (p.20).

One cannot deny that the process of change can be a daunting one to its participants. Yet if no effort is made, then the system is cheating not only the oppressed groups whom they are entrusted to help, but also each one of the individuals in our

schools who deserve better.

The purpose of education

Policy makers and educators have long debated the purpose of education. Many members of society at large seem to have the misinformed perception that schools serve to create an equal society and view education "as a panacea for all the ills of a society" (Doyle in Doyle, Kennedy, Ludlow, Rose and Singh, 1994, p.60). Education is commonly seen as the solution to all problems plaguing society, and ideally it would be, yet the stark reality is much different. Gintis (cited in Torres, 1998) states that "education is an institution for socializing youth into the dominant social structure. If you want a more democratic, more liberating education, you have to have a less hierarchical society in which people really make decisions, especially in the work world" (p.119). Clearly the education system must be revamped in order to better serve the needs of all of its clients and the community at large.

At the heart of the issue of the purpose of education is the concept of equality. Do schools exist to create an equal society or to merely provide equal opportunity for access to all groups within that society? Entwistle (1977) sees equality in terms of much more than financial resources, personnel, and learning materials. He asserts that "equality of educational opportunity implies that no one should be prevented through social or economic impediment from getting the best possible schooling from which he can benefit" (p.8). In this light, then, no child should be interpreted as being less deserving of a good education due to his or her family background or perceptions

associated with him or her.

While many may argue that such is currently the case, it is important to closely examine the means by which we may achieve this. Are our curriculum materials non-biassed toward oppressed groups including minorities and the lower classes? Are teachers empowering students to challenge the stratified nature of society? Grant and Sleeter (1996) found in their study of the school Five Bridges Junior High School that diversity was merely accorded lip-service at the administration level, and classrooms either dealt with the issue in a piecemeal fashion or not at all, therefore failing to broaden the students' knowledge about human diversity. In fact the authors are highly critical of the teaching staff at Five Bridges, maintaining that "there was little at school to encourage students to take charge of their own destinies and to aspire to and prepare for positions that carry power and influence" (p.173). Undoubtedly the teachers at the school, as in many others across America, may have had very good intentions, but due to their own lack of awareness they lacked the background and commitment required to meet the school objectives of a multicultural education.

Why is it then that many assume education to be a public right which ensures equality for all? According to researchers (Freire, 1970; McLaren, 1989; Grant & Sleeter, 1996) in order to "solidify, extend, and legitimate their control, dominant groups structure social institutions to operate in ways that will maintain or increase their own advantage, but promulgate an ideology that presents the system as fair" (Grant & Sleeter, 1996, p.8). A significant aspect of this hegemony that takes place is the way in which we believe knowledge to be constructed.

Grant and Sleeter (1996) found that at Five Bridges Junior High School the staff overwhelmingly espoused the philosophy that knowledge is an entity that can be transferred from one person to another. In this way, unwittingly perhaps, they expected the students to learn someone else's, namely their own, interpretations of the world, rather than come up with one of their own. "Most teachers viewed learning as a process of gaining information directly from the teacher" (Grant and Sleeter, 1996, p.106). Since very often teachers who are university or college educated have belonged to the privileged social class or have risen from the ranks of the lower class, it would follow that the knowledge and attitudes that they transfer would be from that privileged class. "The best education is measured by the access it affords to a privileged life-style- a social network, exclusive cultural activities- facilitated by the fact that teachers themselves are in the network" (Entwistle, 1977, p.46).

A constructivist perspective, however, sees knowledge as being derived from the individual's personal experiences. Middle class values then would not be the ideal to which disadvantaged children should aspire, but would provide one perspective, among others that are equally valid, of viewing the world. Ultimately, "the teacher is a gatekeeper between the dominant culture of the school and the individual student" (Doyle in Doyle, Kennedy, Ludlow, Rose, and Singh, 1994, p.45). He or she bears the incredible responsibility along with the community, of allowing children to validate their own voice and experiences to construct the reality of their knowledge.

Conclusion

While this literature review may have reflected an unfavourable appraisal of schooling, it is important to emphasise that there is much positive in education. We must avoid, however, doing the same things over and over again and expecting different results. If we truly want disadvantaged groups to become critical thinkers, we must unveil the hidden curriculum which seeks to limit access to knowledge.

Unfortunately the reality is that teachers are often not adequately trained for the positions for which they are hired. It is somewhat unfair though, to expect teachers to unrelentingly devote time and effort to a cause that is not adequately supported by the community, the school districts, and government. Faced with limited resources and increased time constraints, teachers may become the scapegoat for the philosophy of a government and the culture it has cultivated over generations. While, to be sure, teachers are important change agents in leadership, it is unfair to lay the blame for society's illness and injustice solely on the shoulders of one group. To do so is to ensure their defeat.

The students in our schools deserve to be guided toward shaping their own futures rather than having them carved out by someone else. Learning must include an integrated understanding of diversity; students must "learn to see those barriers not as 'givens' but as social arrangements that are changeable even if they are well entrenched" (Grant and Sleeter, 1996, p.211). There is still much hope for our schools. In order for our students to achieve their potential though, we, as educators, must embrace all truths and attempt as individuals to construct our own knowledge based on our collective

experiences.

      If the true goal of education is learning, then we need to assess what it is we want our kids to learn. If we want them to learn that there are certain restrictions placed upon what they can do because of their socioeconomic status, then let's continue what we are doing and not give it another minute's thought. For me though, that is unacceptable. That concept causes me to fear for today's youth and the messages they are receiving. I hope that this research study will not only make teachers and the community aware of the hidden biases in education but also to lead organisations toward effective change. After all, your heritage should be a treasure trove of history, not a crystal ball for future success.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Introduction

According to Harvey (1990) "methodology is viewed as the interface between methodic practice, substantive theory and epistemological underpinnings" (p.1). This section will outline not only the data collection methods used, but more importantly the theoretical framework upon which such an investigation is based.

Harvey (1990) points out that the three elements of methodology "coalesce in an overt way in the process of directly investigating specific instances within the social world" (p.1). Doyle (1994) makes clear the distinction between these elements:

Method refers to the various ways that empirical data can be collected. Theory refers to the set of propositions that offers the researcher a coherent vision of education. Epistemology is concerned with the presuppositions about the nature of knowledge that will inform the research (p.35).

In order for the research study to be thorough in its methodological aspect, all elements must come together in the final analysis.

This study utilizes a critical social theory in studying the way in which teachers form perceptions of students and how, in turn, these expectations influence their work. Since the prime characteristic of critical theory is its emancipatory endeavour (Gibson, 1986), I will attempt to unveil the gatekeeping mechanisms to achievement inherent in the current face of education, as well as to empower teachers to challenge this manifestation of dominance. Harvey (1990) would support this endeavour since he

contends that "critical social research thus aims at an analysis of social processes, delving beneath ostensive and dominant conceptual frames, in order to reveal the underlying practices, their theoretical specificity and structural manifestations" (p.4).

Through an open-ended interview process with both students and teachers this research not only identifies the significance of socioeconomic status on teacher expectations but goes beyond that to an "organisation of enlightenment" wherein "research is not confined to unmasking or consciousness-raising but it is also about taking action to change situations" (Habermas cited in Scott & Usher, 1996, p.23).

Research Design

Characteristic of the critical tradition is the use of multiple voices in its attempts to "lay bare the springs of human action as it exposes the roots of injustice and inequality" (Gibson, 1986, p.5). This researcher has selected open-ended interviews as the primary method of data collection.

According to Altrichter, Posch, and Somekh (1993) "interviews are communications that aim at getting to know points of view, interpretations and meanings in order to gain greater understanding of a situation" (p.101). Bogdan and Biklen (1992) concur with this notion of a communicative approach maintaining that the interview is a "purposeful conversation between two people ... that is directed by one in order to get information" (p.96). Since it is the teachers' philosophies on the nature of knowledge and purpose of education that will lend the most insight into this research question, the interview allows the researcher to not merely take an inventory of observed behaviours

but to discover meanings (Mills cited in Harvey, 1990). Patton (cited in Merriam, 1988) asserts that "we cannot observe how people have organized the world- we have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective" (p.72).

Critical research is characterised by its multiplicity of methods. Researchers (Owens, 1991; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Mathison cited in Garrison, 1988) advocate triangulation of data. A theoretical literature review and document analysis, accompanied by a series of student and teacher interviews, allows the researcher to check the validity of recurring themes. According to Owens (1991) "as themes begin to arise from interviews or documents or observation, they are cross-checked with other sources so as to verify them, to check the accuracy of information, and to test different actors' perceptions of given events" (p.300).

Site Selection and Access

The purpose of this study was to assess the role of socioeconomic status in determining a teacher's expectations of his or her students and the ways in which, if any, these impact upon pedagogical approach. The teachers who were interviewed for this study were chosen from schools in the central area of the city within the Avalon East School Board district. A memo explaining the purpose of the study and the scope of the research questions to be asked to both students and teachers was distributed randomly to teachers in each of the two schools. Each site was selected for its geographical location, age level grouping (junior high school), as well as education and income levels as

indicated for that area in the census tracts of Statistics Canada (1996). Those who expressed an interest in participating in the study were asked to return their completed consent forms in a sealed envelope to the main office to be retrieved by the researcher. Of the total sixteen returned forms (nine in one school and seven in the other) six teachers were randomly selected from each school to participate in the study. These teachers all had previous teaching experience in areas of the district other than the inner city. Merriam (1988) says that a purposive sample such as this "requires that one establish the criteria, bases, or standards necessary for units to be included in the investigation; one then finds a sample that matches these criteria" (p.48). A total of twelve teachers were interviewed for the study.

The twelve students who participated in the study were chosen from the same schools in the inner city boundaries as the teacher participants. Each school received letters explaining the nature and purpose of the study, to be distributed randomly to five students in each homeroom class. Again, interested students were advised to have completed consent forms, which required parental permission, returned in a sealed envelope to the main office to be retrieved by the researcher. Of those forms completed, a total of thirty (twenty in one school and ten in the other), six students at each school were randomly chosen to participate in the study. In advance of any interviews permission was also obtained from the office of the Director of Education at the Avalon East School Board as well as from the administrators of the particular schools chosen.

Data Collection

Since a critical approach has been adopted for this study, the data will not be presented in a segmented form but as Doyle (1994) advocates will be placed within the larger historical context. According to Harvey (1990)

> Critical social research requires that empirical material be collected. It
> does not matter whether it is statistical materials, anecdotes, directly
> observed behaviour, media content, interview responses, art work, or
> anything else. Whatever provides insights is suitable. But whatever it is it
> must not be taken at face value ... data are important in order to ground
> inquiry but data must not be treated as independent of their socio-
> historical context (p.8).

The open-ended interview format has been selected for this research study. Yin (1994) claims that open-ended interviews are those "in which you ask key respondents for the facts of the matter as well as for the respondents' opinions about events. In some situations, you may even ask the respondent to propose his or her own insights into certain occurrences and may use such propositions as the basis for further inquiry" (p.84).

Best and Kahn (1993) also advocate the open-ended format since it lends itself to a greater depth of response thereby leading to underlying assumptions. Patton (1990) is quick to point out, though, that "the purpose of open-ended interviewing is not to put things in someone's mind, but to access the perspective of the person being interviewed" (p.278). This type of interview does not presuppose which aspect of the analysis will be

most salient for the participant or the words they ought to use to express themselves (Patton, 1986).

The researcher posed ten open-ended questions to each of the teachers and students. While the wording of the questions was considered in advance, the exact wording and order were not adhered to rigidly. The researcher tried to avoid the formulaic approach since "preformulated questions tend to take your attention away from the interviewee and the dynamics of communication" (Altrichter, Posch, & Somekh, 1993, p.102). The questions had been formed using typologies of Patton (cited in Merriam, 1988) and Strauss, Schatzman, Bucher, and Sabshin (cited in Merriam, 1988).

Patton's typology outlines six types of questions: experience/behaviour questions, opinion questions, feeling questions, knowledge questions, sensory sensitivity questions, and background/demographic questions (cited in Merriam, 1988). The second typology used, that of Strauss, Schatzman, Bucher, and Sabshin (cited in Merriam, 1988), outlines the use of hypothetical questions, devil's advocate questions, ideal position questions, and interpretative questions. The researcher tried to model the interview questions to be used for this study according to each of these samples.

Each of the participants was asked prior to being interviewed if the session might be tape-recorded. Best and Kahn (1993) and Merriam (1988) advise: "this practice ensures that everything said is preserved for analysis" (Merriam, 1988, p.81). Each session was then transcribed for ease of analysis at the data analysis phase. Prior to the interview sessions each participant was given a written request for consent which also outlined the purpose of the study, the length of the interviews, and other pertinent data.

Letters of consent for the students also requested the permission of their parents or guardians for their participation. Sample copies of each of these letters is provided in Appendix A.

Interviewees were assured of confidentiality; once the data had been transcribed and were no longer required for the purposes of this study, interview tapes were destroyed. As Best and Kahn (1993) write: "the ethical researcher holds all information that he or she may gather about the subject in strict confidence, disguising the participant's identity in all records and reports" (p.43). Interviewees were also advised of their right to refuse participation at any time during the study.

Due to the particularly vulnerable nature of the student participant, the researcher conducted these interview sessions in a pair format where requested. "The group interview is a more normal situation for students: the social pressure to talk is lower for the individual because of the presence of others, and if one student talks, this can stimulate comments from the others" (Altrichter, Posch, & Somekh, 1993, p.103). The researcher must also pay considerable attention to the nature of the typical teacher-student relationship. "It is essential for pupils to be clear that the interview situation is different from other question-and-answer sessions with the teacher. If pupils perceive the interview as a kind of exam, they will probably say only what they believe the teacher wants to hear" (Altrichter, Posch, & Somekh, 1993, p.104). Precautions were taken to ensure that the students felt confident to be candid in their responses.

Primary Research Questions

The major research questions for this study have been inspired by the literature review and the themes emerging from that analysis. The following questions guided the study:

1) Does socioeconomic status influence the perceptions and expectations that teachers hold of their students in the schooling experience (including academic achievement, behaviour, motivation, and parental involvement)?

2) How do a teacher's perceptions of his or her students affect pedagogy (including academic standards, discipline techniques, classroom discourse, extra-curricular involvement)?

Interview Questions

The interview questions, designed to tease out the responses to the primary research questions, allow for exploration of relevant themes at a more concrete level. The questions designed for the teacher participants include the following:

1) How would you compare your teaching experience at an inner city school with that of your other teaching experiences? Explain.

2) It is well documented that children of the middle and upper-middle class have higher percentages of high school graduation and post-secondary enrollment. Why do you think this is so?

3) How do you 'see' your role as teacher in an inner city school? Is it any different from what it would be in another school? How?

4) What do you see as any advantages or disadvantages of working in an inner city school? Explain.

5) How would you characterise your communication with parents you perceive to be of low socioeconomic backgrounds? Is there anything you do differently with this group of parents? Explain.

6) Have you had to adjust your teaching style or standards depending on the school setting? Elaborate.

7) Do you think that this school is viewed positively or negatively by the school community? Why?

8) How would you characterise the nature of discipline problems in the inner city school? Is there a difference in the type, severity, and/or frequency of discipline problems in these schools? Explain.

9) What does the future hold for most of these students in terms of education and job potential? Why do you think this is so?

10) Some researchers would say that teachers and schools have not gone far enough to reach disadvantaged kids. What would you say to them? Explain.

The questions formulated for the student participants include the following:

1) Do you think that teachers at this school treat all students equally in terms of grading, discipline, etc. regardless of their family's social class background? Explain.

2) What are some of the things that influence whether or not a student is recommended for restricted programs such as enrichment, immersion, or accelerated courses? Explain.

3) Do you think that teachers prefer to work with certain groups of students because of

their social class or does it matter to them? Explain, telling what you are basing this on.

4) Do the teachers enjoy working in this school? How can you tell?

5) Do you think that teachers deal with discipline problems in the same way for all kids?
Why?

6) Are there any advantages or disadvantages in school for students due to their social
class? If so, explain.

7) Do you think that most students at this school will go on to complete university or
college degrees? Would the percentage of students who do so be any different in this
school than any other? Why?

8) What kind of reputation do you think this school has? Explain.

9) Some reports state that children of the middle and upper middle class have higher
percentages of graduating from high school. What could be some reasons for this?

10) What opinion do you think the teachers of this school have of its students regarding
academic ability, willingness to learn, classroom behaviour, etc.

Data Analysis

If doing critical research is about asking "how come" (Harvey, 1990, p.210), it is
this concept that guided the data analysis process. When reflecting upon the data and
categorising it into relevant themes, Harvey (1990) cautions that "what is important is
that nothing is taken for granted and that what is, or has been, done or said is related to
historical developments and social structures" (p.211).

According to Altrichter, Posch, and Somekh (1993) "critical analysis should

consist of two activities: checking the reliability of any evidence that substantiates a finding, and searching for any evidence *against* it" (p.131). To be sure the process can be a very tedious and challenging one. In fact Harvey (1990) maintains that "the process of assimilating and reflecting on the data and the research process is the most difficult but also the most crucial part of the critical ethnographic process" (p.13).

The first phase of the data analysis process advocated by Harvey (1990) is a multiple reading of the data. He suggests a 'vertical' or chronological reading until the researcher is familiar with the content of the data. "It should then be copied and segmented into different themes, with items carefully sourced and cross-referenced" (p.13). Harvey (1990) goes on to cite Bogdan and Taylor as well as Weis who "refer to this as *pile building* because they literally cut up their material and arrange it, according to themes, in piles on the floor" (p.13). The themes emerged not only from the in-depth literature review but also from recurring statements by the participants. "The process of segmenting into themes is guided by recurrent ideas that occur in the data, but also by the sets of structural relations that appear to bear on the field of study" (Harvey, 1990, p.13-14).

Once the researcher had formulated some analytic categories, she attempted to clarify their meaning and explore their relations with other identified categories (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Harvey (1990) advocates a similar endeavour, stating that "after the first segmentation the data is read horizontally, by theme, to assess the internal cohesiveness of the identified themes and the interrelationships between themes" (p.14). At this point it is essential that the data not be considered only at face value but

as they are implicated in the "prevailing social, political, and economic structure in which the detailed study is located" (Harvey, 1990, p.14).

Keeping in mind that the purpose of critical theory is to "empower the powerless and to transform existing social inequities and injustices" (Giroux & McLaren, 1984, p.192), this researcher will be attune to the interpretative nature of history. Much of what is taken for granted in ideology is socially constructed and maintained by gatekeeping mechanisms. Harvey (1990) says that in critical research "rather than take the abstract phenomena for granted, it takes apart (deconstructs) the abstraction to reveal the inner relations and thus reconstructs the abstract concept in terms of the social structural relations that inform it" (p.19).

The data analysis process was informed by the literature which served the researcher as a sounding board of verification for the meanings emerging from this study.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF DATA

A series of open-ended interviews formed the basis of data collection for this critical study. It focused on the perceptions of the nature of socioeconomic status, the impact it may have on the overall learning process and consequently the implications of these perceptions on the schooling experiences of inner city students within the St. John's region. The interviews also served to glean from participants the impact, if any, of socioeconomic status on the way in which teachers approach their work. This chapter presents and analyses the interview data collected from the twelve teacher and twelve student participants.

School Profiles

As was previously mentioned, this study involved two participant schools in the metro area of the Avalon East School Board. As part of the background for this research, all participants, both teachers and students, were asked some general questions to determine their perceptions of their particular schools. Teacher participants were asked to categorize their school as being either lower, mixed, or high social class. It was clearly explained that a scientific answer was not desired, but merely an overall impression of the school. In fact, it is important to note that teachers themselves are not privy to financial information of students including the names, or even the numbers, of those students who receive social services benefits. Of the twelve teacher participants, seven of the participants felt that while their school contained students from all social

backgrounds, it was predominantly of a lower social class. The remaining five respondents noted that their school was of a mixed social class with no particular class being prevalent.

The twelve student participants, representing their schools with an overall population of about five hundred students each, were asked to complete a Quality of School Life survey which was previously used by the Department of Education as a tool in school improvement initiatives. This short questionnaire focuses on extra-curricular involvement, level of enjoyment of school, and also issues concerning school safety. Of the twelve participants, almost all report being very happy in their current school situation. In fact, only two of the students report not generally liking their school. Ten of the twelve students also indicate that they are usually treated fairly in school and receive the grades they deserve. When asked about the degree to which they feel safe in their school, though, a full third of the students report that they do not feel safe from personal harm along with three quarters of the students who say that students in their school seem to hurt each other a lot.

While, to be sure, this questionnaire was not a scientific survey, nor was it intended to be, these results do lend importance to the many issues that these schools, and some would say all schools, face on a daily basis. Since most students indicate that they enjoy their school, it would seem to give credence to the notion that these two schools are achieving success in many aspects of their school life but that perhaps, at the same time, they may need to focus on issues such as school safety in the years to come.

In tandem with this short questionnaire, this researcher used data from the census

tracts of a Statistics Canada census (1996) to create a general impression of the communities from which these schools are based. Since much of the research for this study concentrates on the inner city school as being one that is faced with lower income families, it was first relevant to establish that such is indeed the case. This probe is not one that is scientific or mathematically driven; it is merely intended, as with the Quality of School Life surveys, to aid in painting the picture of the community and some of its characteristics.

The metro area is divided into more than fifteen sections. While no particular section corresponds perfectly with the school zones, there are significant similarities in the streets covered in the school zone and those in the tract. Since financial information about students' families is confidential, it is felt by this researcher that this information will provide an adequate, though not perfect, picture of the nature of the schools' clientele.

According to the census tracts for the zones in question, most of these zones report fairly high percentages (between thirty and fifty percent) of persons over the age of fifteen having less than a high school diploma as their highest level of schooling. In one part of the zone the percentage was as high as 51 percent not having a diploma, which then ranged down to just 12 percent in another part of the zone.

The census tracts also examined the incidence of low income families for each part of the metro area. Again, for the particular areas in question, incidence of low income ranged from a high of forty four percent to a low of just eleven, but the majority of these zones record incidence of low income families at thirty to thirty-five percent of

the population. While similar numbers may exist in other parts of the province, it cannot be denied that these schools in particular are confronted with issues, that by very nature of their numbers, pose a serious challenge to educators and school communities. Low-income families can be found anywhere, but the number of such families indicates that the participant schools are perhaps more affected by issues of poverty than are some others in the city or province.

This information, as with any other single piece of data, is not intended to serve as a single characterizing feature for these two schools. Rather, this information should serve as background only to the findings of this study. In no way are they definitive of a particular school or of particular problems or issues; they do, however, lend some light to the overall question of study.

Organization of Interview Data

Open-ended interviews were held with twelve students from within the school configuration of the Avalon East School Board, St. John's, Newfoundland. The selected teacher participants were staff members within these same schools, but were not necessarily teachers of the student interviewees. All questions were discussed in general terms and not in relation to any teacher in particular. At the beginning of each student interview, the researcher explained the concept of social class and socioeconomic status to ensure the students' comprehension of the terms involved. Accommodation was made for six of the student participants who requested to be interviewed in the presence of another student interviewee. All other student participants, and all of the teacher

participants, were interviewed alone. Each interview lasted for approximately thirty minutes to one hour.

Responses to Student Interview Questions

Question #1

Do you think that the teachers at this school treat all students equally in terms of grading, discipline, etc. regardless of their family's social class background? Explain.

Of the twelve respondents, eight felt that the teachers in their experiences do not make any judgments based on a student's social class that affect their treatment of students. Some of these same respondents though, did express that a teacher's initial impression of a student might be swayed be their preconceived notions of social class which would later be countered by more accurate perceptions based on the student's actions. Respondents 8 and 4 were non-qualifying in their assertions that teachers are unaffected by a student's social class.

I don't think it matters to them who your family is when they mark your tests or anything. I think that we are all treated the same. They don't care about things like that.

I think that it doesn't really matter about that kind of thing. I think that kids just get sent out to the office cause they are in trouble. Like they did something to get sent out.

Several of the participants referred to the process of grading and how they felt teachers were making an effort to ensure fair evaluation. A detailed review of the test or assignment once it is returned graded to the class is one method outlined. At this time students are given the opportunity to question their grading procedure if they so desire. They discussed how teachers provided opportunity for feedback or clarification regarding grading practices when needed. Student 9 had the following comments.

> I think they are fair. It's like when you get your tests back or whatever you can go and ask the teacher why you got something wrong and they tell you how come you lost marks or whatever. But they usually go over the test anyway so you can tell if you got gypped any marks. But that only happens if they add it up wrong.

Respondent 12 outlined a unique approach by some of her teachers to circumvent the subjectivity inherent in much of the evaluation process. In an attempt to avoid the possibility of grading students on what they think they mean or on the basis of grades students traditionally receive, teachers are trying to focus only on what is in front of them on the written page. An interesting strategy that Student 12 referred to is that of students making up an answer key to the test. Having gone through the test situation the students are afforded an opportunity to discuss with the teacher what information and concepts they feel complete answers ought to contain. In this manner, this teacher is at least reducing the subjective element of evaluation and is also providing another learning strategy for the students. Student 12 stated:

> My teacher usually lets us help her mark so it got to be fair then. One of the

teachers even asks people to write their names on the back of their test so they don't know who it is when they correct it. ... Our teacher gets us after the test to make up what the good answers should have so then we all get to say what is right and if it isn't.

Such an approach in evaluation, where students are given input into the process, also lends itself to disciplinary issues. Respondent 11 noted the fact that many discipline issues are dealt with outside the classroom either after a brief cooling period outside the classroom door or, for more serious problems, at the principal's office. Current standards of discipline techniques, such as those hailed by well known authors Lee and Marlene Canter (1995), encourage teachers to "talk with the student one to one, when others are not around. Never embarrass a student in front of her peers. You'll anger the student and may increase her resolve to misbehave as a means of revenge. Have the student wait after class, or take the student into the hall to talk" (p.101). This teacher is employing similar techniques. Student 11's comments include:

But if you get sent down to the office the principal always asks what you did to get kicked out and when you tell them you might get suspended if like it was pretty bad or whatever. Usually though the teacher just gets you to go outside the door and they talk to you out there. They let you come back in when you say you are sorry.

Four of the respondents felt that a teacher could be influenced by a student's

socioeconomic status in forming expectations for their behavior and ability. It was interesting to view their perceptions of how teachers interpret a student's dress and physical appearance to be indicative of individuals who are more troublesome and perhaps more of a discipline issue. The students did not feel that grading was directly affected by social class perceptions. All four of these respondents noted the impact of a first impression on a teacher and how an individual's appearance can lead to skewed assumptions. Respondent 6 was hesitant to indicate any real behaviors of teachers that she had noticed, and was unable to refer to specific examples which led to her opinion, but she did state that a teacher may be influenced at least initially by what they see.

> I think that teachers might just like have a different opinion of them. Like they
> might think of them differently. Like even if they try not to, just in the back of
> their mind they might. Probably like most people.

One of the students, Respondent 7, also noted a similar situation and indicated that he felt teachers would form impressions based on what they saw, including physical appearance and dress, use of language, etcetera, but that they would quickly alter these views to reflect the actions of the students.

> Like maybe in the beginning they might think someone poor is a hard ticket or
> they don't care or something. Maybe they think that high society kids are smarter
> but I think that after a while they'd probably change their mind once they get to
> know them and everything. Cause like the high society kids could be the biggest
> trouble makers of all after a while.

This student felt that at the beginning of the year a teacher forms ideas about each of the students based on their first impression of them and sometimes this impression includes notions of behavior and willingness to cooperate. If a teacher assumes that a child is not willing to cooperate because of his appearance, and subsequently acts upon these assumptions in her dealings with the students, it will pose some challenge to both the teacher and student involved to repair their relationship. Student 5 also alluded to behavioral issues surrounding social class perceptions:

> I don't think that everybody is treated the same. I think that like sometimes their backgrounds do influence how their teachers treat them. Like if they saw somebody in class and they had dirty clothes and stuff that they would treat them different from someone who is rich and things. I don't think that they would mark them differently or anything like that, but if they were misbehaving or anything like that they would probably be harder on them.

One student of those interviewed expressed feelings that teachers do sometimes allow a student's social class background to be one of the guiding criteria that determines, at least on a subconscious level, the ways in which teachers formulate their opinions of them. This student was quite adamant in asserting that a teacher's interactions with students portray what they are feeling toward that student. Student 3 comments:

> I think a student's social class background matters to them. If a student is known to be a little lower class and they walk into a classroom and they are not dressed

as well the teacher is thinking right away he is going to have problems, like I am

going to have to watch out for them or whatever.

When asked why a teacher wouldn't think that of just anybody, or if it could be due to

some other reason, this student claimed that well dressed and well spoken students have

a group of perceptions surrounding them all their own.

Somebody who is well educated, who has a good family, who is wanting to learn,

who is going to be no problem.

Clearly, in this student's view at least, teachers can allow themselves to be

influenced to a large degree on the basis of preconceived notions of certain social classes

and characteristics believed to be associated with them.

Question #2

What are some of the things that influence whether or not a student is

recommended for restricted programs such as enrichment, immersion, or

accelerated courses? Explain.

All twelve of the student respondents named the primary criterion for selection to

these restricted programs as intelligence and grades. It seemed as though for many of

them an equal parallel was drawn between a person's academic ability and their

production. Only one student noted that a person's intelligence was the most important

factor but that this is not necessarily reflected in a person's marks. Following grades

many of the students chose classroom behavior, attitude and work habits as factors that determine acceptance into such programs.

Several students commented on the selection process that they envision when an individual is being considered for acceptance into an accelerated or enrichment program of some kind. Student 10 made the following comments:

> I think that your overall average is considered. Like the teachers all get together and they talk about your marks in each subject and if they are all good then you get in it. Sometimes the teacher might say well whoever was in it before should get to go again.

In the perspective of most of the students interviewed it was not a clear cut question of marks being the only consideration. Most felt that even students who have a very high average in a particular subject area, but who displayed uncooperative behavior, would not receive acceptance into the program. The level of participation in class activities and homework completion were also noted to be of significance to teachers in the selection process. Some of the following comments, from Students 1, 3, 8, and 12, illustrate these points.

> The higher marks, maybe how hard they try, mostly like their marks and if they are any good at it. It just depends on the child and how much work that they do.

> There could be somebody who is really smart but like just not pay attention in class or totally disrupts the class. They are not going to be going to an

enrichment program where everybody has to cooperate and participate.

Marks, attitude, if you participate in class and if you work hard, like doing your homework and those kinds of things.

I think the teacher picks the teacher's pet kind of person. They don't pass notes or talk too much and they always got their homework done. The teacher really likes them. But like they got to be smart too.

A student's respect for teachers and a positive attitude were also seen to be relevant for consideration in selecting appropriate candidates for various types of enrichment. Student 9, along with Students 7 and 4, felt that even if a student demonstrates a high level of comprehension in a given area she may not be accepted based on other factors such as lack of respect.

Probably if you are suspended all the time or anything too they might not let you do it even if you do got good marks.

Their attitude to the teacher. If they talk back a lot they probably wouldn't get in.

It would depend on how they work in class, like have a lot of respect and things and treat the teachers nice.

One of the respondents, Student 9, commented on the influence of parents as a deciding factor for school personnel. Very often acceptance to an enrichment program, such as Accelerated Math or Late French Immersion, can prove to be a very competitive endeavor for young adolescents. Periodically, according to this participant, a child's parents may sway the balance in the case of an individual who is not guaranteed a placement based on the school's record of evaluation data and past behavior. This, Student 9 pointed out, would be against the wishes of the teachers involved.

> Sometimes your parents can make the teachers let you in though. Cause this guy
> in my class he got in Accelerated Math even though his marks weren't that good
> or anything. And like the teacher said he shouldn't do it but his mom made them.

Respondent 3 named intelligence as the most important factor, but this student felt that an individual's grades are not necessarily reflective of that person's abilities. The impact of earlier schooling experiences on a child was noted as a possible reason to account for low levels of achievement at the junior high or high school levels. This student also noted what is perceived to be a perception of parents from lower socioeconomic homes that their lack of success will be carried on to their children.

> A lot of times intelligence. It has to be. But a lot of the time intelligence happens
> to come with the higher classes because it starts when the children are younger.
> The teachers are like I am going to give up on that child because they didn't try as
> well. And because they are lower class and everything the teachers think well if
> their parents didn't achieve why would they. And so they are given up on earlier

and it ends up being the higher class.

Question #3

Do you think that teachers prefer to work with certain groups of students because of their social class or does it matter to them? What are you basing this on?

The responses to this question indicated that most of the participants did not feel that teachers have a preference in regards to the composition of their classes. One of the students noted that some of the teachers had selected a student helper each week presumably to avoid the repeated selection of the same students for simple tasks such as running an errand or collecting test papers. Unfortunately though, according to this student, this practice did not continue throughout the year. Student 12 commented:

> When they want t.v.'s or you got to go to the office to get a message they pick
> anybody. Some teachers have people picked every week to help them but that
> kind of stopped after a while.

Students 8 and 7 felt in general that teachers showed no preference for any particular social class of students assigned to their courses. They state:

> No not at all. It doesn't matter. They just do their thing and don't care if some
> people are poor or some are rich.

> It doesn't matter to most of them. They [teachers] still want to do their work.

Some of the participants noted that the only preference teachers seemed to hold was for working with students who respected them and were cooperative. These students did not feel that taking a liking to students was linked to social class or perceived backgrounds, but on more of a personal interaction level. Students 10 and 11 comment:

Teachers usually try to like everybody in the school. They go around and talk to you when they are on duty and that, but they sometimes can't help it if they like some people better cause they are really nice to them and they respect the teachers. They don't like people who tell them off in class or anything.

My teachers don't like everybody I don't think because some students get kicked out of their classes all the time, but I don't think it is because of their social class. Like they joke around with you and stuff and they tell you to do your work but if you don't do it then they don't like you.

Two of the students interviewed felt that a teacher enjoys working with disadvantaged kids because it helps the teachers feel good about themselves when they assist them. Each remarked that in their estimation teachers really make more of an effort to help these children and spend more time trying to help them as opposed to some others in the class. Students coming from a lower social class background can tend to be ostracized by their peers and consequently their teachers may be making an effort to compensate for this lack of social acceptance. Students 1 and 2 had the following comments.

The teacher might think differently of a student but like not in a bad way. Like he
might help that student out a little more or whatever.

Maybe they give more attention to those people because nobody likes them and
they are always mean to them, like the people in their class. And they always
make fun of them cause they got no money and laugh at their clothes and stuff.
But like the teacher tries to be really nice to them so they might pick them to do
stuff for them.

Three of the participants expressed that a teacher would prefer, at least initially,
to work with students who appear to be of a higher social class background. One of these
students felt that this attitude may continue for an extended period of time. Student 5
and Student 6 both stated that a teacher may assume that a class of more affluent students
could pose less of a discipline problem to them and also perhaps be a brighter group of
students than their lower class counterparts. They also noted, however, that after a
teacher had an opportunity over a couple of weeks to get to know the students their views
may not be tainted in the same respect. Student 5 felt that this would be largely
unintentional on the teacher's part and that she may not even realize it.

I think that like in their first impression they wouldn't want to treat them any
differently but like they would have it in the back of their mind. Like if you got
on nice clothes and stuff they might think you'll be a really good class. But if
they are all poor and their clothes were torn or dirty they'll probably think they

have a bad class. Like they wouldn't be well behaved. And probably not very smart. But after a while they would get to know who does their work and stuff. They wouldn't keep on doing it.

One of the twelve students, Student 3, expressed similar perceptions but this student noted that the teachers may continue such actions. As with the two previous participants, this respondent referred to notions about behavior and academic standing related to social class which stem from class experiences.

If you had a class of students who were lower class and then you had a class of all these higher class students they would pick to go with all the higher class students because they think they are going to behave better. Some of the stereotypical things they think like you know they are going to behave better, they are going to be better students. In a class where there is a group of students you see how they interact with one student who is higher class compared with how they interact with another student who isn't.

These responses reveal the variety of experiences of the students interviewed. Many of them have not reported noticing distinguishable differences while several of them can see at least initial changes to indicate value judgments.

Question #4

Do you think the teachers enjoy working in this school? How can you tell?

The responses to this question were overwhelmingly positive. All twelve respondents stated that most, if not all of their teachers, enjoy their current teaching assignment. The responses varied from a general comment on the state of happiness to a sense of community within the school. Teacher involvement in extra-curricular aspects of school life were highlighted by several students. In particular the number of teachers taking an active participatory role is noteworthy. To these students this improves school life immensely by giving them more school spirit and also allows them to get to know the teachers on a more personal level outside the confines of the classroom. Students 8 and 3 comment:

> They are involved in a lot of sports. Like some of them come down to see our tournaments even if they are not coaching it and stuff like that.

> The teachers are generally involved in all the stuff that goes on after school. Very much so. Like with the school leaving ceremony a lot of teachers were involved, not just the ones in Gr. 9.

Some of the participants also noted the opportunity for extra help after school as a sign of teacher contentment. It appears that in their view if the teachers were unhappy with their school assignment they would not be willing to offer extra support to students after regular school hours. Student 7 notes:

Well like they always offer extra help before exams and stuff. Lots of times people don't go but the teachers are like 'Guys, if you don't get it let me know or come to the tutorial'. Stuff like that. So they must like it if they do stuff like that.

Most noteworthy of all responses however was the number of references to laughter. Most of the students talked about seeing teachers laugh all the time either in the halls, in the staff room, or during class time. The approach that many of these teachers bring to their jobs seems to be a very light hearted one from the students' accounts. The way that they interact with one another seems to also spill over into their interactions with students. Several participants discussed teachers hanging around after school to chat with them about nothing in particular. Scenes of teachers in their classrooms after the final school bell of the day with several kids in there making conversation about sports or music or anything in general seemed to be quite common. Students 4, 5, 9, 11, and 3 made the following statements.

The way that they explain the work to all the kids. I think they really enjoy it. And the way they socialize with the other teachers. And the way they solve things that go wrong in the school, like when they do clean-ups outside and things.

You can tell they like it by how they treat the students and how they act. They are all friendly with everyone, they'd be smiling, and joking around.

I think they really like it here. They are always fooling around in the halls and stuff. Like one time when we were in class and Miss was looking out the door and there was Mr. X making silly faces behind her back to make us laugh at her. And you could tell she was dying to laugh. You can tell they like it cause they're always doing stuff like that and singing in the concert and stuff. And they did the karaoke one time. Everybody was laughing. It was so funny.

Our teachers are nuts. I'm serious. They have more fun than the students. It's like when you are out in the hallway by the staff room you hear them fooling around so loud. And then they all come out together and then they all start laughing again. And most of them are really involved in stuff after school too.

Yeah, like they are walking up and down the hall together, they have such a sense of community, like they are all singing together and having fun. When somebody is having fun they have to like it.

Question #5

Do you think that teachers deal with class disruptions and discipline problems in the same way for all kids? Why?

Student responses to this question were somewhat varied in that they referred to issues such as gender, past experiences, and patterns of behavior. Most students did agree however that they did not feel that social class was a significant factor in

determining teacher reaction to behavior problems. Two of the students referred to gender inequalities, noting that in their view females usually receive more lenient treatment when they are facing disciplinary action. Girls seem to be given more time to change their behavior before being asked to leave the room and are also seen to be suspended less frequently than their male counterparts. Student 9 states:

> I think that girls get away with a lot more than guys. It's like if a guy does something then the teacher all freaks out and stuff and sends them to the office, bu they just give the girls dirty looks and tell them to stop it but they don't send them to the office.

Several students felt that records of past behavior would weigh heavily with teachers in their decisions of how to approach a discipline problem. If a student had experiences of being in trouble on past occasions, and if their reputation indicated this type of behavior, then teachers were seen to be less tolerant of these individuals. Students who were rarely in any type of trouble, on the other hand, were given some leniency in terms of the consequences of their actions. Respondents 5, 10, and 2 made the following statements.

> I think that like if somebody did something to get in trouble it wouldn't be as bad as somebody who is always in trouble. Like someone who is always not doing what they are supposed to.

> Well it depends. Like if you were in trouble all the time then the teacher just

might get sick of you interrupting them all the time so like they might just kick
you out cause they have no more patience with you. But if other people did the
same thing they wouldn't kick them out cause they hardly ever get in trouble.
People who get in trouble a lot get it a bit harder because the teachers know who
the trouble makers are and then they don't like you either.

Well like people always forget their book in Math and stuff. The teacher lets you
go but he is really mad at them. Then if you get a trail and a lot of people forget
it the same day they might get madder at each person cause they got no more
patience left so that might affect how they treat another person.

Three interviewees remarked that teachers have no different treatment for any
student regardless of their past behaviors or any other issues. Comments were similar to
these of Respondent 4.

It is just when they get in trouble they have to deal
with the consequences and what is coming to them. And I think that is the way it
should be.

One student, Respondent 3, noted that classroom demeanor can influence the
way in which a teacher deals with class disruptions. It would depend on the way in
which a student conducts him/herself on a regular basis in the classroom whether the
teacher would pursue a more stringent disciplinary measure or not.

No, like if I were to go into a class and just say so and so is a whatever then the teacher might think okay she is having a bad day. Just let her get it out and then like you know she'll be okay. If somebody else in my class who usually interrupts and is seen to be a bad student, well they are like get out of the class right now, get down to the office. Suspension right away. It's the whole way I come into a class. Like the way I participate, the way I dress, the way I interact with other students. So they don't think I could be a big behavior problem.

Question #6

Are there any advantages or disadvantages in school for students due to their social class? If so, explain.

Student responses to this particular question centered around issues of social relationships with one's peers, access to private education, as well as participation in some school events and activities. Two of the twelve interviewees, Students 1 and 7, noted attendance at a private school as a privilege afforded to people who are more financially secure. These students recognized this as a benefit to families of the higher class because they would receive, the students felt, a much better education.

There is an advantage cause like if you got a lot of money you can bring your child to really cool places to see stuff. And if you have a lot of money you can put your child in for extra education at a private school. And if you don't have a lot of money, like not saying that it's bad or anything, but like you might have to go to a lower class school and not get as much education. Cause private schools

they got extras, like more money for books whereas a lower class school does not have any money so they'd have to get cutbacks and stuff.

Well I guess that they could go to a private school or something if they have more money. That would be one advantage. They'd probably get a better education. They'd have lower student teacher ratios so they'd have more time to ask the teacher questions. I guess it's not too bad here though.

The ways in which students are treated by their peers was also seen as a potential advantage or disadvantage in one's schooling experiences. Interactions with one another can prove to be highly influenced by the perceptions that are associated with one's family and social class background. According to many of the participants, it is quite easy to determine an individual's socioeconomic status by the way in which they dress, their social skills, the language that they use, as well as perceived drug use. Students can find themselves the victims of teasing and even bullying, according to these respondents, because of how they are perceived by their classmates and others in the school. Respondents 2, 6, and 10 shared some views on these issues, as illustrated in the following passages.

You get picked on by other students who maybe have more money than you. Like they might make fun of you cause you have a hole in your shirt or they might make fun of you for other reasons. Like they think they are better.

Maybe the way you are treated by other students. If you have a low social class they might look down on you. Like they might call you a skeet. They would respect people with more money just from looking at them.

I'd say that for people who are low social class they get picked on a lot by other people. They call them names and make fun of how they look and stuff. They don't wear what's in style and sometimes they smoke weed or whatever.

Two of the students, Respondents 9 and 11, referred to the access of more or better school supplies as a possible advantage for students coming from more affluent homes. The students did not see this as any form of inequality, however, stating that usually it doesn't matter if someone else's calculator is more advanced, for instance, or if they have newer or better geometry sets. Participation in field trips was also named a challenge for disadvantaged students since many of them may not have the access to the money that they need in a short period of time. The students say that some excursions are planned with perhaps a week or less notice, while others are planned well in advance. The school, and also the teachers personally, were seen as the equalizers in these instances, with students recalling past experiences of teachers purchasing lunches or school supplies for students from their own money. In the case of field trips students who do not have access to the money needed are often told by their teachers, the students say, to go anyway and the school will cover the cost. According to one student however some students are too embarrassed to avail of the school's offer. Students 9 and 11 offer

these comments:

> Not really I don't think. Well I guess you could probably see some small things like better calculators or something but other than that no. Most of the time if you don't have the stuff then the teacher will get it for you. Like one of my teachers got binders for people who didn't have them out of her own money. I think she felt bad for them.

> I'd say the biggest thing is like when your class goes on a field trip or something and sometimes they cost a lot and the poor people don't get to go. The teacher will say that like if you don't have the money then that's okay. Just tell me and you don't have to pay or whatever. But nobody does. They just stays home and goes on the pip. Sometimes you got to bring a note though.

One of the students, Student 12, noted access to sociocultural activities as a benefit to having more wealth and status but did not associate this with any possible benefits in school. Travel opportunities were seen as a major plus to this participant, but again no link was made between experiential learning and formal education success.

> I'm not sure if they have advantages in school or not. Like I think they have a way better life cause you get to do lots of stuff when you got a lot of money. Like one of my friends visits all of these places with her dad. He goes for his work right and she goes with him. But in school I don't think they have it better or anything.

One of the interviewees, Respondent 3, saw distinct advantages associated with social class perception and the level of personal attention one receives from teachers. Teachers would be more willing to invest time into the growth of students from a higher social class whereas students of the disadvantaged backgrounds would receive less tolerance.

> Yeah there are very much advantages because if I were to go into a class a teacher would give me more attention, would be more willing to participate, to interact with me, help my ideas or whatever, to help me progress and grow. But if a lower class student goes in they are just like let me just get through the year. Then when they are out the door, they are not my problem any more.

Clearly, then, the students' interpretations of advantages or disadvantages range from the concrete matter of school supplies to the more intangible lack of teacher attention.

Question #7

Do you think that most students in this school will go on to complete university or college degrees? Would the percentage of students in this school be any different than any other?

Responses to this question ranged from very few, 30 %, to those who felt that most students would, up to 75 to 80 %. Several of the students pointed out the fact that each school class was different in nature and in its attitudes, so it would be difficult to

make a determination on the entire school population based on this limited exposure. Financial considerations proved to be of much significance for many of the students as they felt that some students in their school would not have the opportunity to pursue post-secondary education due to a lack of financial resources. Participants also pointed to the high level of extra-curricular involvement at their school as a benefit to some students in securing a scholarship which would solve some financial woes for students. Almost all of the students felt that the post-secondary enrolment numbers would be similar in other junior high schools across the city. Students 1, 10, and 7 had these points:

> I think most of them will. Like the people who are trying really hard they'll go on to university but like those who don't care they'll just stay back and repeat the grade. You have to have a good average to get into university. Probably be the same in other schools. We'd probably have a little bit more cause our school has a lot of sports teams and other extra-curricular activities and stuff like that so that is also what counts when you want to go to university and get scholarships or whatever.

> I think that maybe about half of students will. Some people don't have enough money to go and so they got to get a job when they graduate instead of going to university. Some people want to do something else so they won't go either. But lots of people will go.

> I'd say 80 % will go on. It's kind of hard to say. Probably be higher in the

French class because they got mostly all high society people.

Two of the participants, Interviewees 11 and 5, were hesitant to attach a number value to the percentage of students who would attend post-secondary education since, as they pointed out, it was at least three years away for students if not more. In their eyes, there are too many things that could happen in the interval to influence a person's decisions so it would be very difficult to make such a judgment.

> That's a hard question. I don't know. It would all depend on the people themselves. I don't think you should stereotype people like that. Some people don't know yet what they want to do but they will probably go anyway. I'd say people will change their minds a lot before Grade 12.

> I think that there is a lot of people that don't care, right now anyway. But they might change their mind.

An individual's own personal perceptions of his/her abilities , as well as the support from parents and teachers, was also noted to be a determining factor for some students. Students who do not receive a lot of encouragement may interpret this as a sign that they are not capable of achieving a post-secondary graduation. Students 6 and 3 state:

> There is a lot of people who don't even think about it. Cause like they don't think they can. They don't try and they don't care. Usually if they have that

attitude they are probably not getting a lot from their parents, like support and stuff. I'd probably say like 70 % would.

A percentage will go, but first of all for lower class people money is important. So it'll be hard. By that time they might give up on themselves. I know there are a good few students in Grade 9 who are seventeen. They are going to give up on themselves soon. When they get to a certain age they can drop out. That is the way they see it. About 30 % will go. There are the ones who will try to break the trend, try to go on to do better so their children will have a better chance and everything, but a lot of them will probably just give up. They will give up on themselves, their teachers will give up on them, their parents will give up on them. Then there is no point.

When asked if the percentage would be any different in other schools this participant, Respondent 3, had this to say:

If I were to look at SCHOOL X where all my friends go, in their classrooms there are a lot of higher class students because of the area that the school encompasses. Their parents would be making them and first of all they are higher class students so their teachers will be saying you have to. Their parents will be more involved in their academics with the teacher and they'll have to. And they know it. So a lot more of them would.

Many factors obviously must be taken into consideration in trying to make such an estimation, but the responses of these students shed light on their perceptions of how those around them see the world. In their views, finances and one's own self image, which can be shaped by many things, can be important influences for many students in deciding upon their future endeavors.

Question #8

What kind of reputation do you think this school has? Explain.

Most of the students interviewed felt that their school had a negative reputation in the community and city. What all of them agreed on is that this perception is a very inaccurate one. Students expressed much frustration at having to be the brunt of gossip, exaggerated stories and negative media reporting. Friends in other schools hold a very tainted picture of their schools they say, and they have had enough. Several students acknowledged the efforts of school personnel and the parents to change public perceptions of their school, perceptions that some say were created without giving them a fair chance. The schools' involvement and success in extra-curricular pursuits was also highlighted by several participants, including Respondents 8 and 9.

I think it is excellent. We win lots of stuff. It's a good school. Our teams represent our school really well when we are out on tournaments and stuff like that. All my friends think it is a good school too.

I think we have a really good reputation. Our school has won a lot of sports and

stuff. And a lot of the people are in music too so that's good. We have also won different things this year so then people will say SCHOOL X is pretty good and then they'll want to come here too.

Two interviewees, Students 7 and 12, noted very negative perceptions of their schools in the general public. According to them, it is a common public perception that their student body is a violent one that is involved in frequent drug use. While each of them also expressed that they are quite happy at their assigned schools, and that they really enjoyed their experiences this past year, they feel that many people do not have a positive view of their schools.

A bad one. That we're all hard tickets. A bunch of skeets. Some of my friends didn't want to come here because of the kids on the side of the school and stuff. They think there's drugs and smoking. Just getting in trouble and stuff. People are afraid of getting beat up. Some of my friends didn't want to come because they said people steal and stuff. Most people aren't really like that though. People just think it's really bad.

Lots of people think it's really bad or something. People are always saying that it's full of drugs and you'll get beat up all the time. It's not a snotty school that's for sure but it's not like that either.

Several of the interviewees, Respondents 6, 11, 1 and 3, expressed frustration

with the comments being made in the public, admittedly by some of their own students, that are untrue. While one of the participants noted that it is largely a human trait to exaggerate to make one's accounts more interesting, they are tired with the reports in the community that their school is unsafe and drug laden when they feel it is not. One of the participants pointed out that the bomb scare incidents at the earlier part of the year did not help their schools, but many people forget that several schools in the city were plagued by similar incidents. Students expressed much frustration at trying to dispel many of the lingering rumors of violence and drug use. Comments from Students 6, 11, 1 and 3 include the following:

> I hear some people say that there is a lot of trouble at our school but I think we have a good school. Usually people hear about the bad stuff. Like the bomb scares. ... They never hear about how we win tournaments and other things. Just the bad things.

> All my friends at the other schools say it's a hole. They all think we have no stuff and that we're all welfare but they never even came here before. People says that there's lots of fights around the school but I hardly seen any. People get carried away saying stuff like that. I think they just exaggerate a lot.

> Like SCHOOL Z thinks that they are a better school than this school. ... All they ever thought about was their school but like not the students. Our school is more like our people, like the people in it. It is way better than the other ones cause

like it is way bigger, it has more supplies, we have more activities. Like SCHOOL Z has only basketball and soccer but we have hockey and volleyball and stuff like that too. And we never had an athletic assembly before. My cousin on my street, she thinks we are really bad, like there's holes in the walls and it's a dump.

This school has a reputation for a lack of a better word skeety, very low class, like fights, drugs, everything else. When actually it is not. It is not like that. Like when I go out people are like 'Oh my God. You go to SCHOOL Y. You poor child.' And I am like 'No actually it is a very good school.' Our school is a lot better. Like SCHOOL X is supposed to be such a good, fun, preppie school but in actual fact they are a lot worse than us. Like the drug busts they had, the fights they had, like all the time. It's because of the lower class. They just assume they are going to be more aggressive, violent, they are going to be more into drugs and alcohol or whatever and that the higher class have better ideas of what is good and bad for you or whatever. The lower class students in this school know better how to deal with themselves. They have much more life experience. Like they know how to get themselves through life without having to get into fights, like how to be mature all around.

For these students at least, improving their school's reputation is a needed task for the student body to undertake in the next school year.

Question #9

Some reports state that children of the middle and upper middle class have higher percentages of graduating from high school. What could be some reasons for this?

Parental influence figured significantly in the responses to this particular question. Other students also mentioned personal stress, lack of encouragement, and low self esteem as possible reasons why there are fewer high school graduates from the lower socioeconomic backgrounds. One of the students discussed the impact of years of having a poor self image, due to social class designation, on a disadvantaged child. It was felt that a young person would perhaps not have the drive to persevere in their efforts to improve their lives. This respondent, Interviewee 4, stated that sometimes disadvantaged kids don't even believe that they can do it.

Sometimes like when people are poor they kind of give up on their life and so they won't get the chance to go. They just give up on things and they won't go for it. I think they could do it, but they won't go for it. They don't think they can.

Most of the participants, including Students 8, 9, and 5, however, noted family involvement as a significant contributor to the ideals held by young individuals. Parents of the higher social class tend to be more attuned to the school requirements and often, according to them, have a better understanding of the schooling experience in general. The notion of the middle class serving as positive role models for their kids was also discussed.

Well probably the parents care a bit more about school for their child. And they

try to help them all the time. Maybe they say to their kids that if they do well and then they go to university and they do well they would give them the family business or something. So they try really hard to do that.

Well maybe their parents are always telling them that they got to graduate so they can go to university. I know that is just a stereotype but I'd say that is what it is. Probably they think that if they want to be like their parents and have a lot of money they have to go and get a good education. The other people just might not think about it a lot.

Cause maybe like their parents support them a lot and they want to be like their parents too. And they are being told that you need an education and they look up to their parents and think that is what they are supposed to be like. If they are high social class they think that is what they got to do too. I think it starts with not thinking you can do it. Maybe it started at their home. And it is not like all people. Lots of them do. But sometimes they are just learning that is okay. It's acceptable.

One of the interviewees, Respondent 7, placed more emphasis on the difficulties that disadvantaged youth are confronted with on a regular basis as an indicator of why fewer of them graduate from high school. He felt that the stress they are faced with in their day to day living may place less of an importance on doing well in school when

compared with other more fundamental concerns such as food and safety. This respondent notes the fact that they may be expected to provide some child care services for a period during the day that would make coping with the requirements of schooling a difficult task.

> Maybe because they got less stress and stuff. They are not worried about as much stuff as other people. They get stuff done for them a lot at home and they get to go to a lot of places and stuff. I guess it's hard to do your homework if there is a lot of stress at home. Their parents probably make them study a lot more too. The other people might have to help their parents too much to do stuff for school. Lots of them babysit or whatever.

Question #10

What opinion do you think the teachers of this school have of its students regarding academic ability, willingness to learn, and classroom behavior?

Student opinions for the final question of the interview were in general very positive toward their beliefs of what teachers think of the student body. All of the interviewees felt that staff at their schools believe the students to be of at least average intelligence if not higher. Some students pointed out that while not everybody is achieving at least average grades that this was an indication of other mitigating factors and not a lack of ability in the teachers' eyes. Students 8 and 7 comment:

> They seem really proud of their students like they have assemblies to announce

who got honors and stuff.

I think they think we're pretty smart. Maybe we could do better but we're pretty smart. Probably be a lot of French Immersion smart people.

Interestingly, two of the participants mentioned the high ability perceived to be in the French Immersion classrooms. No reason was offered for this but they pointed it out almost as an aside, as a given not needing clarification. They also seemed to share in these perceptions themselves. This percentage of the overall school population was also discussed when asked about teacher perceptions of willingness to learn. One of the interviewees, Respondent 3, felt that teachers sometimes can forget that French immersion students are not always highly motivated learners.

Well the French Immersion classes the teachers would love to have them over the English classes. Right away it is like you are here for French Immersion, the skeets are all in English. They are like name one skeet in French. My God, you can. Do you want me to try? And so like the teachers with the willingness [to learn] it is per class and sometimes they don't see that.

Concerning behavior, the students again made positive comments saying that teachers feel the vast majority of the school is well behaved most of the time and that only a few students pose serious behavior problems. Interviewee 3 was quick to point out that teachers expect a certain number of minor behavior issues in the run of a day and

that for the most part that is all they experienced. This student recognized strong leadership in the school from the school principal as one of the factors responsible for an overall positive climate in the school.

> I'd say they think it is pretty good overall. We have it pretty controlled and fair too but I think that is based on the leadership we have in this school like under X and everything.

Student responses have clearly outlined a vast array of experiences over this past year. Once again, in fairness to the schools participating in this study, a year is not a long time to develop the climate of any organization. Both schools encountered difficulties along the way and it is hoped that the results of this study will help both teams to recognize some of the strengths they may build on and some of the needed areas for change.

The results of the teacher interviews will now be discussed followed by a detailed analysis of the emerging themes.

TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Twelve teachers working in the same two schools as the student participants were interviewed for the purposes of this study. Each teacher had experiences teaching in the inner city school and in at least one other school setting. The range of experience in each situation varied widely and should be considered when analyzing the data obtained. For

most of the teachers their experiences in an inner city school came as a result of the vast restructuring by the Avalon East School Board effective for the school year 1999-2000. For most of them this was their first year in the inner city setting while several teachers had previous experience in inner city schools in other areas of the country. The following is a detailed review of the results of those interviews.

Question #1

How would you compare your teaching experience at an inner city school with that of your other teaching experiences? Explain.

Responses for this question draw on several aspects of the school climate and culture. For several of the participants this past year has proven to be a fairly difficult, or at least challenging, one. For instance, one teacher who has had rural teaching experiences in the past found that there seems to be more of an even playing field in the inner city school as compared to some rural settings where the population is so small that differing backgrounds seem to become more significant. The larger school populations seem to allow for more of a mixed population. Other teachers described differences in the types of discipline strategies that they needed to develop for this particular experience.

Four of the participants compared the inner city school teaching experiences at least equal to, if not preferable to, other positions that they have held. Two of the participants pointed out that working in the inner city school gives them the opportunity to work in what they described as a very *real* environment. They feel that other schools

may paint an inaccurate picture of reality and therefore leave its students and teachers ill prepared to deal with the issues facing our youth today. Teacher 4 comments:

> It was a wonderful experience. Very real. You get to see a lot of the social problems that you are buffered from in other schools.

This individual described the inner city school position as the ideal one for his personality since it keeps him aware of what is happening around him and does not allow him to ignore the reality of students' lives.

Another teacher, Respondent 2, wanted to clarify popular rumors that inner city schools are laden with overwhelming behavior issues. He described the inner city school as having issues that are somewhat different from other schools but are none the less no more difficult in his experiences. He noted the ability of higher socioeconomic status kids to know the system and how to use it to their advantage whereas often the disadvantaged child, he says, often lacks social skills and respect.

> A child from a better socioeconomic background *can* be more polite, but they tend to be more knowledgeable in how to use the system or how to get away with certain things, you know to be more scheming. Whereas a child with difficulty in socioeconomic background can be more crude and rude and just simply disobedient when you ask them to do something. Whereas a child from a better background would not come out very often and be outright disobedient but will cause problems in different areas and in different ways like maybe a lot of teasing and stuff.

Another teacher, Respondent 12, who spoke very positively of working in the inner city school, noted the willingness on the part of disadvantaged students to work with the teacher in trying new ways of learning. She found her students to be more receptive to innovative ways of reconstructing the curriculum and traditional ways of learning as compared to experiences working in what is characterized as a very affluent school. Students coming from higher social class backgrounds were somewhat dismissive of what was not termed enrichment which proved to be a frustrating experience for this teacher.

> At INNER CITY SCHOOL X in general the students seemed to be more receptive to different things such as different activities, new activities, you know different ways to teach French, different things that were taught in French. Whereas at the higher socioeconomic schools they wanted everything to be done the way it had always been done. They didn't want different things to be taught. They wanted it to be totally academically focused. You know the only thing they were willing to take into consideration was anything that was named enrichment. Whereas at the lower socioeconomic school they would do lots of alternate activities which to me were enrichment activities anyway.

Three of the interviewees, Teachers 10, 9, and 5, experienced some obstacles this past year. They describe being somewhat unprepared for the challenges that faced them in the diverse nature of their schools. Lack of supplies, lack of social skills, and a lack of motivation on the part of their students have made this experience a frustrating one. The

teachers note that they feel compelled to purchase supplies for some of their students who do not have the essentials. Parental support has also become an issue as they say they are having a difficulty getting the type of involvement that they need. Comments from Teachers 10, 9, and 5 include the following:

> I mean these kids have no supplies, just the basics even. I've never had to spend so much of my personal money on supplies for the kids, buying them paper and pens and things. I find that I am teaching manners, just good manners as opposed to the curriculum sometimes you know. There are a lot more discipline problems as well and it can be hard to get the parental support that you need.

> Oh there is a world of difference. I mean last year the kids had much more respect for authority. We have a lot less resources. I'm buying stuff for the kids. You know I can't count how many pencils I've bought this year. There seems to be a lot less of a work ethic in this school right now. Many of them don't seem to care. I mean I try not to take it personally but it is hard sometimes you know. And I am wondering am I a failure as a teacher? You know and I take it all home with me and it's hard to get it off your mind sometimes. I'm getting used to it now though and it's not so hard as it was.

> In some ways it is a lot worse because it is a lot of have-not kids and have-not means the basics. No pencil, no paper, no book and most of the time there is very little support from home.

Two of the participants, Teachers 3 and 8, who have had experience working in the French Immersion setting in the past referred to differences that they have noted in the two streams. Home study habits and discipline appear at the top of their lists of the differences that most stand out for them. Teacher 3 describes having considerable difficulty in adjusting to this new environment since past teaching experiences did not seem to require a well developed repertoire of discipline techniques and intervention strategies.

> I haven't needed to develop a whole lot of disciplining strategies or behavioral
> modification strategies to work with Late French Immersion students. ... I find
> that now teaching in an inner city school I am having to work with average and
> very often below average children and children who have a lot of behavioral
> problems and discipline issues that I find that I am somewhat at a loss very often
> as to what to do.

> The French Immersion stream was much more competitive toward marks, better
> study habits, generally you've got both parents as opposed to single parents.
> Those are probably the biggest factors that are evident. You don't have to fight
> with the Immersion kids to do homework, however the other ones you've got to
> chase them around. Organizational skills, basically the whole school perspective
> is much better.

While these two teachers describe challenges they are facing, they are very positive about

this experience in other aspects of their positions as will be described in their responses to other interview questions.

Discipline issues were highlighted by several of the participants, including Teachers 7 and 11. A lack of student respect not only for those around them who are in positions of authority but also for their peers and for themselves seems to be evident. Consequences of misbehaving also need more fine tuning, says one participant, because at the present time many students are not deterred by what is currently in place.

It has been a quite challenging and difficult year in many ways. The nature of the students I find is quite different from what I have had in the past. They are different in that they don't have the same form of respect for other people, for themselves or other people, for teachers or administration, that I have seen in previous schools in the last little while. There is a greater percentage of these students. There certainly are some better or similar but more of them have these respect issues.

In general the inner city students seemed to be less concerned with consequences like going to the principal's office or detention. In other schools most of the students seemed to be more concerned with any disciplinary action. I think this can be attributed to the values taught to the students by their parents.

Home study was also discussed as a challenging aspect of working in an inner city school. Two of the interviewees, Teachers 1 and 7, noted that there needs to be a

stronger base of homework completion and study. In part, this can be attributed to challenging authority in the junior high but according to these participants, it is also a prevailing attitude in the inner city school.

> The biggest difference in this school even from other schools I have been in is that there is no culture for home learning. Everything is expected to be done in school. There is no support from Mom or Dad with respect to homework for most of the kids. And when I say most of the kids I mean not 51 % but I would say 75 to 80 %. The other 20 % are great, and they are there and they are among the best that I have ever taught. But there is not a lot of support here for doing homework outside school.

> I think that their social skills are not strongly developed , they are very much into you owe me something. I am really not responsible for myself. You should be responsible for me. They expect a lot in terms of that. There are a lot of similarities for motivation which is in part due to the nature of the beast in junior high, but I think there seems to be a lack of overall good work ethic and that is certainly not just here but there is a lot less homework done here. You can do all of your phoning home here but you won't get as much in the way of response from the kids.

One of the teachers, Teacher 1, also pointed to the lack of supplies provided to the school as one of the most detrimental and difficult obstacles to overcome this year.

In this participant's opinion adequate money was not made available to their school to purchase or up-grade equipment. (The dollar figures quoted by this teacher have not been verified by finance personnel.)

> There are huge differences in terms of the parental support, in terms of showing up for school, in terms of having money to pay for things like books, field trips, etc. There is no cash around. And also this school has nothing. This school started this year with no start-up capital. Every other school in the province was given $65 per student. Our school was given $65 per student the same as them but we didn't have a computer lab, an eraser, a pencil sharpener, not one in this school. ... And I understand that a lot of people like to take their stuff with them but it wasn't replaced. There was nothing here and no extra funding to put it in.

The diverse nature of teacher responses to this comparison are indicative of the broad realm of their perspectives on the inner city school and what it entails. Some teachers appear much more adapted to this environment than others which could be due to their own personal backgrounds as well as to the type of previous teaching experiences that they have had. A more well rounded view of these perspectives is provided through all ten interview questions. It is not advocated that any one question be solely used as a definitive statement on their experiences.

Question #2

It is well documented that children of the middle and upper-middle class have higher percentages of high school graduation and post-secondary enrollment. Why do you think this is so?

Responses to this question overwhelmingly focused on the parental influence in the home. Virtually all respondents emphasized the significance of a positive parental role model for disadvantaged kids in order to stop what many see as the cycle of lower levels of education and, consequently, less success. The teachers felt that the middle class parents are, for the most part, providing an example for their kids of the kind of hard work it takes in order to become a successful working member of society. None of the participants stated that they felt a lack of ability was responsible for the apparent lack of success in high school for disadvantaged youth.

Three of the interviewees, Respondents 5, 4, and 6, referred to the feeling of powerlessness on the part of the disadvantaged child to change his/her circumstances in life. For many of them, according to these teachers, they do not see it in their reach to change the situation they were born into and therefore do not have the self esteem required to empower change. These feelings of lack of control and empowerment are then passed on to their children who in turn adopt them and thus the cycle continues.

In my experiences I find people who are 'middle-class' strive harder to be out of it as opposed to people who are lower class. It is almost this vicious cycle: I am lower class, my kids are going to be lower class. And it just continues. There is no fight to get out.

What you see now particularly in the inner city is that there is not a lot of value placed on education. And I also saw this in CITY X in the inner city the attitude was go to school because you've got to. Yeah, I don't care what kind of marks you get. Just get out of the house and go to school. And a lot of kids had the attitude that my mom and dad are on the dole and I am going to be on the dole so why should I bother doing anything in school. And I am seeing a lot of those parallels here in St. John's. ... They don't see a relationship between education and economic success. Consequently the kids don't walk out of the house saying I need to do this.

The children of the lower socioeconomic classes do not have the role models, they don't have the incentives, the effort is not there, the work ethic is not there. Their expectations are somewhat lower because for many of them the situation they are living in. They don't expect to get much beyond that because they have never known anything different and unfortunately many of their parents don't try to instill in them that there is anything beyond this. You can do better. I'm in this trap for whatever reason but you don't have to be. But they are so apathetic themselves that they don't try to instill in the child that they can do better and get out of this circle, this game.

This respondent also drew a distinction between the inner city child, for the most part, and the working poor. The working poor do instill a positive work ethic in their children

and are supportive of their efforts to succeed, but the inner city child is often lost to the cycle of powerlessness.

Access to knowledge outside the direct realm of the classroom was named as another reason for the predominant success of the middle class child in education. These children are afforded access to cultural knowledge and social skills that come from experience in the community at large and from other social interactions. Many of the skills needed for success in school, such as cooperation, time management, and communication skills are learned and fine tuned in the interpersonal interactions they enjoy. Being provided with more educational material at a young age was also seen as a distinct advantage for middle class youth, the ramifications of which may not be fully appreciated until several years later. Teachers 5, 11, and 12 offered the following comments.

> I think their parents have a higher education, recognize the value of education and pass those values on to their kids. They also have more opportunities to grow through broader experiences outside of schooling. I mean like dance and Scouts and teams and Spanish lessons and whatever else they are interested in.

> Students from the middle class obviously have a much greater advantage from the get go. They are more surrounded by books and educational resources and parents who tend to be, not always, but tend to be, more concerned in their child's schooling. These children are in a position to attend more cultural events if you will which obviously can play a big role in their schooling.

Family support in the form of not only economics, well I mean it has not only to do with economics, more books at home, more opportunities to get activities outside of the school, academically, socially, physically. Also previous backgrounds of attending higher levels of school, high school or university. More knowledge from the parents, more guidance from the parents to be able to pursue those kinds of goals.

While four of the respondents identified parental guidance and role modeling as a definitive factor in the success of their children, one of them pointed out that it may not be quite so simple. In the opinion of Teacher 10, perhaps the parents do not lack the motivation to encourage as some others may feel, but instead find themselves emotionally drained from their problems on a daily basis to be directly and intensely implicated in their children's schooling. Faced with mounting personal and family issues related to finance and providing, these parents may simply lack the energy to deal with something else which, at least in the immediate time frame, may seem less significant.

Their parents [of the middle class] are much more involved and instill in their kids at an early age that they won't get anywhere without working for it. The parents of the other kids are so caught up in their own problems of financial difficulties for example, that they don't have the emotional energy left to deal with things like your child's homework is not done today. And they don't see the relationship between homework and learning and therefore success.

One of the interviewees, Teacher 3, placed responsibility for this trend of higher percentages of high school graduation of the middle class on the shoulders of all of society. In her opinion, we as a capitalist society are all to blame for the lack of proportionate success in this sector of our society. The fact that a person's self worth has come to be largely determined through his/her economic success has led to an eroded self esteem manifested by low levels of achievement. If we wish to change this situation society must be more willing to take a critical evaluation of its own culpability.

> Personally I think it goes very deeply into the basics of what a capitalist society
> is. We have created a society where only the people our society deems as the
> 'better' people are the ones who get ahead. Your personal worth, how much you
> are worth as a person is based very much on how much money you earn and
> therefore people who don't fall into that category are not given the same amount
> of value by our society. Generation after generation I think has eroded the self
> esteem of a lot of these people. And nowadays we have created a system where
> these people don't even consider education anymore. We have created the
> problem ourselves I think. I think we need to get back to empowering the
> underachiever and the less fortunate child. You know, giving them the skills they
> need in order to arrive wherever they want to arrive.

The structure of the school system, and not necessarily that of society in general, was the focus of the response for one final participant, Teacher 1. In this person's view, the nature of schooling and the way in which it is structured creates a lack of

understanding for the plight of the disadvantaged child. While teachers may try to do whatever they can to help this sector of society, this teacher feels that they still lack a true understanding when their own beliefs, cultures and histories are different, despite good intentions and sympathy.

> Schools are being operated by people who have gone to university and most have grown up on this side of the tracks and not on the other side. So it is unfamiliar to them. Our attitudes, our beliefs, our whole social structure for most of the teachers here are completely different from those of the kids that we teach every day. We have no understanding. And we like to think that we do but we don't because we've never been there. ... we really don't understand where they come from even though we may try. Most teachers don't understand. We might care, but we have no understanding what it is like to live off fifteen to twenty thousand dollars a year for a family. Most teachers don't. They live off fifty to one hundred thousand dollars a year.

What is clear from the responses is that this is a complex issue with many causes, some of which are suggested by these respondents.

Question #3

How do you 'see' your role as a teacher in an inner city school? Is it any different from what it would be in another school? How?

Three of the participants, Teachers 2, 1, and 12, identified no difference in their

role as teacher in the inner city school. Delivering a curriculum and being aware of the
needs of their students, and trying to meet these needs, are primary objectives for
teachers no matter what the environment. An effective teacher has to teach the assigned
objectives as defined by the Department of Education and try to develop in his/her
students an active involvement in, and responsibility for, their own education. Teachers
2 and 1 comment as follows.

> I honestly don't think that my role is any different. I think that I am supposed to
> be a teacher that is supposed to not only teach them the academic side but to
> become involved in school, to know the students, and to help them mature to
> become better adults, no matter if I am in a school where the kids come from a
> better socioeconomic background or not.

> No. Junior high kids are the same. Poor kids are the same as rich kids. Junior
> high is junior high. The only difference I think is I might have some outside
> duties to try to raise funds or to get support from outside but that has nothing to
> do with the kids.

When asked to define what the role is as a teacher in an inner city school this
participant, Teacher 1, clarified that it is not different than it is somewhere else. Getting
students to become involved in school is the ultimate goal of all teachers. The vehicle to
that goal may be sports, drama, or any other activity or subject area which interests the
students.

I see my role here as making it a nice place to be, a safe place, trying to engage the kids any way I can. I like to hang around so I am at school all the time so I like the kids to see old' X is there. And I think that makes a difference. Kids in junior high don't come and ask for help. They don't make appointments. But if you are around and they bang into you... 'oh, sir how about this?' I guess a lot of that is due to sport but that is just one avenue I have through basketball. I see my primary role is to engage them, to find anything that they like, and then run with it so that I can have a relationship with them. Now I always say to the teachers here we need to do two things. First is we've got to understand the kids, be nice to them and get along with them. But that is only good if you get to step two which is that you teach them. I mean if you think that you can be friends and be nice and engage them, and you can do that, but if you don't get to step two there is no point. I think it takes a long time to get to step one and for some of the kids here we didn't get there this year. Because they still don't trust us. We're still outsiders.

Trying to gain that trust of students was highlighted by five of the respondents as the key difference in their role in the inner city school. For these teachers, disadvantaged kids need more support and compassion and understanding than many of their middle class counterparts. This is not to say that all students, regardless of background do not deserve and require understanding, but merely that this need is more evident in the inner city. This role, in tandem with the curricular requirements, can become overwhelming

for some teachers, particularly those who have difficulty in separating the lives of their students from their personal lives at home. Teachers, including Teachers 6 and 5 here, discuss burn-out and frustration with their own feelings of helplessness.

It takes on a life of its own. It takes on a life of its own. And the thing is you can let it consume you because you know I always think of this thing if you could spend a couple of hours in most of their shoes you would understand why they act the way they do. But you can only do so much. ... My job is still to come in here and deliver the curriculum. That would be the same if you were middle class upper class or whatever it is. The problem is to try to do the job because in your room there will be so many children with so many stories and their lives are so complicated that no twelve year old should have a life this complicated.

This year more than any I've been teacher, nurse, parent, basically you name it, counselor or anything else. In the past I've been teacher but I didn't feel as though I had to play as many, on occasion yes, but not as consistently as I have this year. I've had to be so many different people all at the same time. And having taught someplace else I know that I was teacher and friend, friend without being a buddy, but I didn't feel the need to be both mom and dad and nurse.

The remaining respondents found that their role is more concentrated on breaking the pattern of lower levels of education for the disadvantaged. Trying to identify for kids that there is a way out within their reach and that they are capable of succeeding in that

endeavor regardless of the lifestyle of their parents is key to these teachers. Providing their students with access to the kinds of information that is perhaps not readily available to them in society at large due to their social class status is essential to this role. The following statements from Teachers 12 and 8 illustrate this point.

> I think that the kinds of support that I need to offer lower socioeconomic schools is different from higher socioeconomic schools because the school is the only place these children can, at least a great majority of these children, have exposure to the books, to the courses, to the languages, to the supplies, to the equipment. There is not so much of a need for me in the higher socioeconomic school to provide those children with everything that they are going to be required to have even beyond the curriculum, but for the lower I mean I have to be able to provide them with every opportunity because the only opportunity they are going to get is at school.

> I think that in an inner city, in a lower socioeconomic, I find I am more of a salesman. I find that I am constantly selling the concept of education and the need for it. I guess the big picture is you are trying to break the cycle. If one child in the family can get their high school education and it breaks the cycle and who knows what will happen after that. I think that would be the biggest difference as far as the student goes. As far as the parent goes, in the middle class I think you are dealing more with parents on a conscientious level of how their education is going versus the lower end where you are just trying to meet the

parent and getting them to be a participant as opposed to them just sitting back and letting us try to do it for them.

While the role as identified by the teachers does not change from school to school, the way in which they approach this role may be redefined for most of them in the inner city school. Its unique challenges in their view dictates a more involved and understanding aspect than that of the purely academically motivated.

Question #4
What do you see as any advantages or disadvantages of working in an inner city school? Explain.

One of the teachers reported a more relaxed environment in terms of parental pressures as being one of the advantages of working in the inner city. While the parents are still involved in their children's education, it does not seem to be a stressful encounter for this teacher as the parents' primary goal is not to question the teacher. With increasing demands for accountability from many parents some teachers may begin to feel second guessed and somewhat uncomfortable. For this particular teacher, Teacher 8, the parents in the inner city are predominantly more interested in helping the teacher do his/her work as opposed to questioning the approach or evaluation used.

I think there is less pressure by parent contact. Basically the parent still believes the teacher is a good person and tries to do the best they can versus kids that

come from higher backgrounds I find that the parents tend to be ... you have to be a lot more accountable as a teacher. If they get an answer wrong on a test they want to know exactly why and the detailed breakdown of marks. So I find that a bit more stressful.

Opportunity for professional growth and development was also identified as one of the advantages of teaching in the inner city school. Since teachers are faced with conflict in any school setting, but perhaps more in the inner city, it provides a valuable opportunity for the teacher to build important skills and also to learn more about their students on a personal level as individuals. Teacher 2 makes these comments.

I look on myself now as I can actually really grow more and really learn more about the students and maybe the different types of problems that they have and how to deal with them. Their behavior can be more difficult but if you learn to deal with that it says a lot about your skills as a teacher.

Five of the interviewees highlighted the reality of the inner city school as its biggest advantage. They felt that these schools mirror the make-up of society with their cultural and economic diversity. Since society is made up of all social classes and people of differing values and histories, it would stand to reason that the inner city may be the most effective preparation students can get for the challenges, both positive and negative, that await them. Staff relations also figured as part of the equation for these participants who felt that their staffs had worked more closely and more cooperatively than other

staffs of which they had been a part. Teachers work intensely with one another to improve their schools. Teachers 9, 5, and 10 make these statements.

Advantages? I'd say the staff is great and I think we have pulled together more so here than we would have otherwise. We are closer. Our vision for where we want this school to go is more well defined.

I think that one of the advantages is it is a more true look at reality because I was spoiled in the other school and it was really nice but realistically I don't think it was a good representation of our society.

The biggest advantage is that you see the whole spectrum of society. It's real. The staff here is really excellent you know and it is good to be able to work together like we do. And we really work hard to help the kids. We really do.

The remaining group of participants identified the feeling of closeness and worth as a teacher as the most significant advantage of the inner city school. For these teachers working with disadvantaged youth has allowed them, on both a personal and professional level, to get a great feeling of satisfaction in helping someone realize their potential when even they didn't see it themselves. Inner city kids appreciate more of what you do for them, according to these respondents, and leave their teachers feeling positive about their impact on their futures. Teachers 12 and 1 put forth:

Although the children need to be taught more social skills they also tend to be

more grateful for the small things that you do for them. It is very rewarding to reach even one child in a year and with a lot of disadvantaged kids you have the opportunity to reach more of them than you do to reach children who have all of the supports already in place for them.

The advantage is that if you really offer a good program you really can make a difference because they don't have a lot of opportunities. The school can really be a center of learning. As long as it is a center of activity it can be a center of learning. But it has got to be a center of activity first. It requires some money and some commitment you know.

Three of the respondents did not identify any disadvantage in their experiences teaching in an inner city school. Of the remaining participants, three referred to a lack of resources as a central concern. The fact that schools have been restructured and reconfigured in many instances has lead to a deficiency of appropriate resources in their schools for this past school year. Teacher 1 refers to a lack of access to funds as an issue.

In this particular inner city school in this particular year there was a huge disadvantage of being here. This school opened without funds and it wasn't ready. We weren't given the support to provide even the smallest hope to some of these students to have an equal year compared to other students in other schools. We didn't have a chance.

Half of all respondents pointed to a growing sense of frustration as the biggest disadvantage in their eyes. Giving of oneself outside the hours of the school day, mentally as well as physically, is becoming very difficult for some teachers. They feel as though they are powerless at times to effect change for these kids, and they endure much inner conflict because of this. Knowing the circumstances of the personal and family lives of some of their students has both enabled them to work with them more effectively but it also causes stress and concern for them in their own personal lives. One of the teachers discusses a sense of personal loss felt because of the kids she was unable to reach this year. Feeling powerless to eradicate the effects of the students' past experiences is overwhelming at times. Comments from Teachers 8, 5, and 7 include the following.

It is frustrating to try to teach a curriculum and follow a set of objectives that you know they are going to have to meet in order to go to another level. It is frustrating when kids don't do homework or you are constantly having to deal with the same issue over and over. It is a case where you can't undo fourteen years of damage that has been done at the home.

I think that at times it is heartbreaking to try to teach when you don't have the materials and I don't mean teacher materials. I mean like the kids don't have the materials other than the stuff on their desks. They haven't had breakfast. They haven't even been home the night before. One of the kids I teach sells hotdogs downtown so sometimes he comes in and just puts his hood up and puts his head

down and sleeps for an hour. And I can't wake him up because I don't know if he has been out all night cause I have no idea. So that is the biggest disadvantage. It is hard to get around to the teaching when you have to get around their life first. That is tough for me. I had a really hard time in the fall adjusting ... I took a lot of stuff home. I had a hard time and even now I take it home but I don't take it personally. At least I try not to.

I think there is also a sense of personal loss here. Like I have felt more successful at the end of the year in just about any other year that I have taught other than this one because there are so many kids that I feel could have achieved but have done nothing. And you wonder should I have done something different, how could I have motivated them and yet you know it is not just you because every other teacher has got the same ... but I think the sense of loss ... and I think we have lost a lot this year.

Question #5

How would you characterize your communication with parents thought to be of low socioeconomic backgrounds? Do you treat them any differently or do anything that you would not necessarily do with other parents? Explain.

Two of the interviewees reported very positive relationships with parents in their schools. For each of them being able to identify with the parents on a more personal level, through extra-curricular involvement for instance, enables them to nurture positive

communication. One of the teachers, Respondent 12, referred to the sense of support from lower socioeconomic parents in developing a strong school community. Problems certainly do arise from time to time but it is the positive relationship already in place that allows them to progress and move on. The following is a sample of comments from Teachers 12 and 8.

> In my experience the parents are very involved, very involved in the school community ... whereas in other schools that I have taught in the parents are only there when there is a problem. And what I mean by a problem could be that they feel that their child deserved a better mark so they are in your face about that. Whereas the parents in this school would be involved with you up to that point. So there is a better relationship there to deal with problems and discrepancies with marks.

> I identify with them well because of sports and outside interests. I don't take it as personal. A lot of teachers, the ones who I see are extremely stressed out, tend to take it very personal and an attack on their integrity, but I don't see it that way. I take them for what they are and I approach them at that level. I think they believe what you are trying to do as a teacher is right for their child and I find that I have got a lot of support that way.

> While four of the other participants characterized their relations with parents as positive they also felt that there is a breakdown in the level of home-school

communication. They put forth that there is not enough communication between teachers and parents to discuss the relevant issues. Parents of the lower socioeconomic background are less prone to attend parent-teacher conferences and are more difficult to reach at home concerning issues to be discussed. Teachers 9 and 10 state:

Report cards are not returned signed whereas before I'd have them back in a couple of days. Last year I had all of my interview sessions booked and I was there till well after they were supposed to be over. This year I didn't see most of them. Those who came are supportive and you know want to help but there isn't enough of them.

Well they don't come in. They will listen to what you have to say but there are not any changes. You know, you can't get them in and you can't get them on the phone. I mean some of them don't even have a phone. I make calls and they are not returned. I make appointments and they don't show up. You know, so what else can we do?

This lack of communication was also an area of focus for three of the other interviewees who felt that it could be explained by a lack of confidence in themselves or fear of being inept. Parents may feel intimidated by the teacher and the jargon that they use or the details of the curriculum they discuss. This particular group of parents may be viewed as unwilling to become involved, or as incapable, but are perhaps fearful of being

out of their league. Statements from Teacher 3 are indicative of this.

> Some of them don't have enough self confidence to question what teachers are doing. It could well be a self esteem issue on their part, where they are not willing to admit maybe or show that they don't understand what it is you are doing. They are probably more willing to accept your word for things more so than somebody who is from another background. But you know for the most part I find that they are easy to get along with.

One of the teachers, Respondent 5, reports feeling a sense of frustration with the parents who seem to have given up. The kids are the real losers in this situation since they are being robbed of encouragement that they need.

> I don't think I treat them differently or should I say I try not to but sometimes I look at them and I feel bad for them. I don't feel sorry for the ones who are pushing their kids and are trying to help their kids. You know if they push their kids and want something better for them then all the more power to them. But I feel sad and sorry for the kids of the parents who have given up and the parents who look at me and say well I was never any good in school so I don't expect them to be. That doesn't make any sense to me.

Two of the teachers interviewed, Teachers 7 and 1, stated that relations with parents are largely positive in nature but that there needs to be more of a link between home and school regarding exactly what the parents are responsible for. Homework

continues to figure greatly in their concept of learning outside the classroom and they feel that many parents do not adequately support this notion. It is not seen as a blatant rejection of the school however, but as a cultural value that needs to be cultivated.

> A lot of these parents I think from talking with them at meetings and on the phone they are frustrated with their kids. They don't know what to do with them and parenting is so hard these days anyway. And when you are looking at doing it with few things to work with. And I think in a sense from our experiences in this school the parents are very open and very caring. ... I think there is a real breakdown in communication between the home and school as to the importance of homework. I think that 95 % of what gets done for school has to be done in the classroom.

> I think they do not support the idea of doing homework. There is no culture there. They don't support the idea of okay there is a time from 5:30 to 8:00 when you do homework or whatever. When you don't watch t.v. They don't support that idea. Do they support the teacher? Yes. Most of them will do anything they can to help their children pass. They just don't know what it is. They support you but you have to tell them exactly what it is and telling them once over the phone in September is not enough. They won't remember just like their kids.

The nature of parent-teacher relationships is complex to be sure. The fact that parents of the lower social class have so many survival issues to deal with on a daily

basis makes this relationship all the more difficult to nurture. One thing is certain though. For each of these participants, it is key to breaking the cycle of poverty.

Question #6

Have you had to adjust your teaching style or standards depending on the school setting? Elaborate.

Only one of the twelve respondents, Teacher 7, reported changing standards in the inner city school. This is due however in part to the environment and also partly due to changing expectations of education in general. If you were to compare standards of twenty years ago with that of what they are today, this participant feels that while creativity would be much better, the use of conventions and overall structure would be weakened for students in any school. At the same time though, expectations for evaluation have lowered somewhat to accommodate what appear to be lower levels of achievement this past year. Whether this is an isolated phenomenon this year or whether this will prove to be a continuing trend remains to be seen.

> But I think a little bit my standards have lowered this year. There are just so many students achieving at a low level from what I am used to seeing. Our pass rates are way down from other groups. And they don't read, they don't take any time with their answers. And I think I have sort of come to a point where I'll say well I think this is what he means so I'll give him the points and I would not have done that a year ago.

All other eleven participants were adamant that they do not change their standards of teaching or evaluation even in minor ways. It is important that students not be subjected to varying standards to suit what is perceived to be their ability or production levels. One of the respondents emphasized that standards of not only curriculum and evaluation must not be altered but also standards of behavior and conduct. Other participants concur with this notion saying that as teachers it is vital to raise standards and to maintain them at a high level since the students will surely rise to meet them. Teachers 12 and 8 put forth these statements.

Standards? No. Expectations need to be at a level that people can meet so that they can be successful but *everyone* can meet a high level or a high standard. So if you don't expect a lot you won't get a lot. If you expect a lot and if you put things in place for people to succeed then they will eventually come to the fact that they can expect a lot from themselves and can put supports in place on their own and can therefore excel and exceed.

There is a certain level of expectation of how I believe I should be treated but I also believe they should be treated the same way. I really make that point that they are just as valuable as I am. I don't make a value judgment on their home life. It is not my job. My job is to take them for what they are and move on.

Half of the respondents report not changing their teaching style in the inner city school. The other half of the teachers interviewed maintain that they have made from

minor to drastic adjustments in the way in which they approach their class and evaluation. Minor changes could encompass something as simple as keeping all textbooks in the classroom to avoid loss of books and to improve on time management in the class to providing more handouts for in-class completion as opposed to strictly using the textbook. At the same time however, some of the adjustments being made are more far reaching in nature. Some of the teachers find that since homework completion has been a problem thus far, the overall pace of learning has slowed somewhat to accommodate the increased demands on class time. The method of learning has also shifted for one of the teachers from a more cooperative learning environment characterized by group work to a more structured lecture type lesson which sees the teacher controlling the direction of learning. This could change of course, once the students have acquired the skills necessary for such a learning strategy. Teachers 7 and 9 made these comments.

> These students seem to require a lot of structure with the teacher being the dictator of the structure. They don't have the self discipline to be able to work in small groups. And that really puzzles me and I have tried it so many times and I keep thinking what am I doing wrong here. I have been doing this for twenty five years. But it seems to me that for them to be able to concentrate on what you are doing you have to constantly be on task with them and you have to constantly be there 'Stop talking', 'Put this down", and it is extremely structured. I am sure that if you look at any kind of motivational teaching from the classroom I don't think what we are doing is fitting in at all but I don't know what else to do.

I am more patient, more tolerating. You know, I am happy to get the assignment at all let alone on nice, clean paper, neat and tidy. I am thrilled to get it even if it is two weeks late whereas before I don't think I would have accepted it. And the pace is a bit slowed because so much has to be completed in class instead of at home.

One of the teachers, Teacher 5, admitted that small adjustments of style have been made in an effort to make the classroom more conducive to learning in light of the hardships that some students must endure. While standards do not change at all for this individual, style modifications allow for a more accepting tone in the classroom.

Standards? No because at the beginning of the year I set the bar and you either meet it or you don't. It doesn't get lowered for you. But how I teach? Yes. Like little things... I have never handed out so many pencils... I have never given my book to so many people overnight so that they can get homework done. I have slowed things down because kids are half asleep. I have brought in cookies because kids are hungry. Like these things used to be a treat but sometimes I do it just because it is Tuesday morning and I know you didn't have anything. So I have slowed things down, a lot more handouts, because I find that they can focus more on what is directly two feet in front of their faces as opposed to me in front of the classroom.

Question #7

Do you think that this school is viewed positively or negatively by the school community? Why?

What is most remarkable about the responses to this question is the emotion it stirs in the teachers. Overwhelmingly they feel that their school is being judged too harshly and without merit with respect to rumors of widespread drug use and violence. A strong sense of frustration is clear with these teachers who are tired of the pity, the judging looks and inaccurate comments. While most of the teachers interviewed felt that their schools have a negative public reputation they also seem to feel that those who are *in* the school on a daily basis, the teachers and students, don't share these perceptions at all. The teachers for the most part are tired of hearing the negative media reports and public comments but feel powerless to change perceptions at least in the short span of one school year. Several of the interviewees, Teachers 10, 5, and 6, highlighted the positive attributes of their schools that they feel are often short changed in the community and are smothered by gossip and rumors.

> The kids love it here. The teachers are complimented a lot on the level of extra
> curricular involvement that we seem to have and on the variety of activities. You
> know I know of other parents who are trying to get their kids in here for that
> reason. Our teams and choirs and you know other things have all done well and
> just the overall good spirit.

Many parents felt that a junior high of this size was going to be a jungle. Do I

think that any other school is better? Maybe in some ways yes but in other ways definitely no. But my own child would go to this school. Knowing what I know about it now, absolutely my kids would come here. People have jumped the gun too much. I teach here and I was apprehensive before I got here but the administration and the staff have pulled it together and I don't think that I would change that.

Go to any school in this city, junior high, and you are going to find difficult children, and I don't care if you are from the most affluent neighborhood or in the inner city. And you are going to find both places has its problems. Every school will have its problems as much as they are here.

Two of the interviewees referred to concerns they have heard from parents who are apprehensive of enrolling their children in their school for the next school year. And it is clear that these staff members feel that public perceptions of their schools are inaccurate and laden with rumors of violence and drugs. Teacher 7 comments:

I have had many parents especially in the last couple of months during phone calls home and they say you know 'I am not sending my child there next year'. You know they say there's drugs and alcohol and there is this and there is that. And I say you know it is a junior high and you are going to get most of those things anyway. But I think there is a perception out there that we have a really terrible school but it really isn't and you know that is unfortunate. Really

unfortunate for these kids.

Frustration seems to be the predominant emotion expressed when relating the ways in which their schools are referred to by members of the public, but it is anger when fellow teachers are the source of this view. Several of the participants discussed being pitied by other teachers who wish them well and then remind them at least it's a job or at least they can look for a transfer. While obviously not all teachers feel this way, it is clear that to them many teachers in the city are falling prey to this perception of the inner city school. These respondents are tired of the looks that speak volumes and express frustration at the stereotype. One teacher says that their school was never really given a fair chance to be anything but 'an inner city school': one that is plagued by negative publicity associated with drugs, alcohol and violence. These statements from Teachers 9, 1, and 7 illustrate this point.

> The worst school in the city. There is drugs, alcohol, smoking, you know. And you have other teachers who sigh 'Ah' or who pat you on the back and say 'What a sin' or 'too bad'. And that is hard to take. And you get tired of it. Because we didn't have a chance to be anything other than the inner city school. They think it is violent and out of control. There are subs who don't want to come here because of what they have heard. And parents, I've had parents saying 'Should I let my kids go there?'. 'Would you let your kid go there?' You know things like that. And it is very negative. And none of the good things are ever talked about.

The worst school in St. John's. It is rough, it is violent, it is horrid, the kids are abusive to one another and to teachers, [various puns on the school name] it's a hell hole. 'Where do you teach?' And when you tell them 'Ahhh. Sorry, hang in there.'

Everywhere I go people pat me on the back and say 'you have my sympathy' when they find out where I am teaching which makes me infinitely angry because it is not that bad. ... I think it is really a downer for most teachers in this school because I think in the community as a whole we are viewed very negatively as being a school that is in crisis, a school with many problems, as a school that has really been unable to work itself out of those problems this year.

The teachers say they are anxious to begin a new school year that will hopefully bring them new opportunities to dispel some of the misconceptions of the inner city school.

Question # 8

How would you characterize the nature of discipline problems in the inner city school? Is there a difference in the type, severity, and/or frequency of discipline problems in these schools? Explain.

None of the interviewees stated that there is any difference in the type or severity of discipline problems in the inner city but all of them noted a higher percentage of

problems. In their view, no matter what junior high school you go into there will be problems of vandalism, truancy, lack of respect and use of inappropriate language. In the inner city school however there seems to be, at least on the basis of this first year of operation, a higher number of these issues. Two of the interviewees, Teachers 7 and 1, felt that this could be due in part to well meaning administrators who are hesitant to take firm action against a student who creates disruption because they feel sympathy for them due to their family or home circumstances.

> We have cases where incidents occurred many times this year where a student should have been suspended or something you know firmer control and the student was let off because the principal has felt that oh you know you have to understand the situation. You know a parent died last year or something but it doesn't excuse the behavior. I think that many teachers have been frustrated this year because behaviors have been allowed to continue and of course that impacts on the class because they see a certain student get away with something and then somebody else tries it. So I think that we may have a few more but they are not any different from what you would see in any other school at this level.

> I'd say that there is no school tone whatsoever except chaos. I would say that the discipline/administration is laissez faire and I think it is condescending towards the kids because these kids need a lot of structure. More structure than other children because there is no structure at home and I think that the discipline

approach in this school is that because there is no structure at home we shouldn't force structure on them here because it is anti their upbringing and it just creates chaos. Whereas I disagree with that. I think that if we had extreme structure it would give them some balance in their life. I disagree with certain people in this school. And we are unable to change anything unless the culture is changed and maybe the administration or at least its approach.

One of the respondents, Teacher 8, noted that the discipline problems are magnified due to the difficulty in accessing many of the parents. Financial problems result in many families being unable to afford a phone at home which poses a problem for teachers who wish to speak with the parents to discuss an academic or disciplinary concern. When students know that the teachers will be unable to contact their parents they may also be more willing to be uncooperative in school since consequences at home are minimized.

I don't think that they are any different than anywhere else. I think that they are overwhelming. The volume of discipline problems I would think to be at least five to ten fold of a normal junior high. Problems that we encounter are lack of phones, you can't communicate with the parent because they don't have a phone and that is directly related to their income. A lot of our families are split. They are split marriages and finding out the one that you can legally correspond with is a problem. Absenteeism for an odd reason is not as severe as it may look on the books because a lot of the kids come here because it is a break for them. Home is

not fun and it is not a nice place to be but there is lots of activity and their friends

are here and they have a sense of belonging. I'd say if I compared the end of the

year with the beginning of the year it's night and day.

Possible reasons accounting for the apparent increase of discipline problems in

the inner city school will be analyzed later in this study.

Question # 9

What does the future hold for most of these students in terms of further education

and job potential? Why do you think this is so?

Of the twelve participants for the study one teacher, Teacher 1, felt that the

disadvantaged kids had only slightly less of a chance at succeeding in the future than

their middle class counterparts. If the students can make it through the junior high on a

regular program then most of them will have about an equal chance of success.

All I can tell from my past experience with children like this is that they have a

lot of opportunities to succeed just as other kids do. I figure if we can get them

through Grade Nine, if we can get them through Grade Nine successfully, so that

they can get into a regular program in high school, not a modified one, they have

got you know maybe only slightly less a chance than 'rich kids'. But that is the

challenge to get them through Grade Nine here.

For three of the teachers it was impossible to hazard a guess as to their futures.

With so many other variables to consider, and of course the element of time, they were unwilling to characterize these students as doing or being anything in particular. The individual was the most relevant factor in this question and it would be difficult to put a face on what any one individual could do. Teachers 12 and 3 comment:

> I couldn't even possibly hazard a guess on that. The reason is because these children have at least three more years of school. These children have their whole lives ahead of them. It is not fair or right or even in my realm of possibility to put a negative or positive expectation on these children where there is just too many other variables to talk about. One being teachers, another being change of family, another being change in lifestyle. There is just too many variables to even be able to state what these children can possibly become.

> I'd like to think that the education system is going to work its way around the issues and be able to find a way to validate these children and help them learn to validate their own person to the point where you know they are not always being demoralized and you know their self esteem is always being attacked. ... because we wouldn't be in the profession I don't think if we didn't care about people. So I'd like to think that the education system is going to improve to the point where those less advantaged would be better served but I am not sure it is going to happen.

Seven of the respondents stated that the future does not look bright for many of

the disadvantaged youth in their schools. Whether it is due to a perceived lack of motivation, a lack of encouragement, or a lack of confidence, the sad fact remains for these teachers that many of their disadvantaged students will bear a likeness to their parents' situations right now. One of the teachers referred to the cycle of poverty where in the realm of these students' thinking there is no alternative to the hand they have been dealt. While none of the teachers could define percentages with any degree of certainty, some of them tossed about numbers ranging from 50 % to up to 80 % living lives similar to those of their parents. Following is a sample of comments from Teachers 6 and 9.

> For most of them they will continue the circle. They will quit school and they'll be bright individuals who will be frustrated and quit. They will become a part of the system of social services and welfare. They will have their own children and continue the circle. Some will make it out. The working poor- they'll make it out. They'll all get out. It's the ones that have nothing and the parent that is so frustrated now, and so sad about the system themselves, so caught in the system themselves that they can't try to get through to their kid to get out of there. Some of these kids if they do get out it will be getting out in low paying jobs. But it might be enough that they will instill in their children that you can get out and then the circle is broken.

> Of my home room 80 % of them will go to college or university. They are a great class. Really bright. Of my 8's I'd say most of them may drop out, perhaps have low paying jobs. I can see about five females of my 9's becoming young mothers

perhaps. And they have little concept of the long-term consequences. About half, 50 % of the school will go on to post-secondary. Unfortunately many of them will probably become their parents twenty years from now.

Several of the teachers lamented over this sad situation and admitted to worrying about their students greatly. Some of them say that they have many concerns for their students who they characterize as bright and intelligent but who will not achieve their potential. While, as one of the teachers, Teacher 5, pointed out, three years can bring a lot of change, it is nevertheless troublesome that these students will have to face so many obstacles in their future.

Some of them are trying really hard to make something of themselves. Some of them have accepted, and I have heard them say this, and I don't know if they are limiting themselves, but some of them have said that well I know I won't get in to university but I want to go to college to become a secretary or whatever and all the more power to them to have some ambition. Some of them, even today just this afternoon, I heard well I am going to fail anyway. I am going to drop out so why should I even bother taking the notes now. So some of them have already given up. What does the future hold? I have never been so worried about a set of students ever as I have been this year. ... I honestly can say that for this particular group of kids I really have no idea where they are going. I have never been so bothered thinking about their future.

While certainly it differs in every home, this participant, Teacher 5, refers to what can sometimes be a lack of encouragement in the home as being responsible for this poor attitude. A parent who did not succeed in school themselves may feel that their child will have a similar fate and so may not want to set them up for what they may see as a failure by making them believe in something they think will not happen. Consequently the child may feel inadequate and give up. This is not to say that this is always, or even usually the case however, since it is easy to point to a case where a child receives a lot of encouragement and still does not choose to make an effort.

> The way they say it and they repeat it, 'well I'm a failure'. I have actually heard one parent say it to their kid when they were here and I thought to myself at the time well if you are saying that, that is more than half the battle. Where do I start if they come into my classroom with that attitude?

Question # 10

Some researchers would say that teachers and schools have not gone far enough to reach disadvantaged kids. What would you say to them? Explain.

Three of the respondents agreed wholeheartedly with the assertion by many researchers that schools should be making greater strides in their efforts to reach disadvantaged youth. In their opinions it is much more practical and effective to invest more time and energy into this sector of society now than to pay for it later 'in the courts'. One of the teachers proposed having teachers spend more time in the school

building after school hours so that they are available to students. Some feel that more involvement of teachers in extra curricular activities, though might engage students in their education and give them constructive ways of developing useful life skills.

The need for more specialist time and training for teachers was also seen as a necessity. Teachers need to be more aware of the needs of disadvantaged youth and the ways in which they can begin to meet those needs. One of the respondents also felt that these students should not be required to pay for any books, school supplies, field trips or other educational costs. Otherwise, if the current system is maintained, we will continue to fail some of our most vulnerable members of society. Teachers 1 and 7 put forth:

> I agree. I think that if we had this staff here at SCHOOL X, if we had twenty five teachers that *just* stayed 9 to 5. Nothing else, but stayed 9 to 5 we could solve a lot of problems. If we had just *half* of the teachers involved in really positive extra curricular activity once, two, three times a week, just half of them, we'd have a really different climate. But the teachers seem to be really burnt out. They don't seem to be supported by the school board, at least that is their perception, and I share that, it is my perception as well, but some of them said well if they don't care I don't care. And just like kids sometimes it's contagious and it gets really negative.

> I would be 100 % behind them. I think that especially for inner city kids we need to provide small classes with the best of technology that is available to them, people trained in teaching students in even having learning disabilities or are just

age grade behind, you know not performing at their level. It requires a lot of special teaching. It also requires special facilities. And we have a really good bunch of teachers this year but I do think that if we are going to save this level of society wherever it is, in St. John's or wherever, we have to go in there and we have to face the problem up front and that problem is the fact that these kids need to be motivated by somebody and if they are not going to get it at school, and they are not going to get it at home then we are going to pay for it in the courts and as they say we are paying for it in the courts quite a bit now. You have got to pick it up somewhere. It would be so much easier to solve it on this end.

The remaining nine participants did not agree with this assertion and expressed much frustration at being 'everything' to these kids. They feel overworked and devalued by a system that they say is demanding more of teachers but is not providing the resources to fulfill these obligations. Time figures largely in their reactions, with many of them feeling constrained by their daily responsibilities and ineffectual in much of their efforts. Many state that class size is also a significant concern for them. They say that in the inner city, if these students typically have more needs, then it would stand to reason that there be smaller class sizes to accommodate those needs. More responsibility on the part of families is also needed to make any significant changes to the system. Teacher 9 illustrates this point.

Well I'd say that before anything I want families and students to start accepting some responsibilities. You can offer the extra classes after school but you can't

make them show up. So they'd better start to contribute and accept accountability for their actions. So that's the first thing. Second, more resources. We don't even have enough computers to take a class there. ... And I'd like some training too. Train me. I'd welcome all the help I can get. I don't know how to approach the serious types of problems many of them deal with. Time. Time is huge. I have three preps in a seven day cycle and lunch duty every second day. I need to eat my lunch. I'm averaging three after school meetings a week. You know some weeks one but other weeks four. It's impossible.

The frustration felt by this teacher is shared by many of the other interviewees. The fact that their job is becoming so much more than what occurs in the classroom and the curriculum is leaving many of them at a loss as to what their next course of action should be. They request specific strategies and examples of things to be done because they say they don't know what else to try. Teachers 5 and 12 state:

Well I would like the list of suggestions of what else to do. I mean we attempt to feed them three times a week, we provide materials, you know when we do graphing we actually photocopy graph paper and give it to them. I hand out pencils and erasers. I listen to them when they have something to talk about outside of school. So I'm doing the teaching, I'm doing the providing, I'm doing the parenting, and being a friend, and other than lowering the standards I don't know what else to do for them. And is it fair to them really to lower the standards so they can get an education that is not up to par and then send them out to the

world and expect to get by?

I would say number one give me specific concrete examples, number two give my school board and me the resources needed to implement those specific examples. And number three if you are talking about me personally you are probably wrong. If you are talking about some teachers you are probably right, but if you are talking about most teachers I think that you are probably wrong as well.

One of the respondents, Teacher 8, disagreed with the comment that teachers need to do more for the disadvantaged because more needs to be done to address the needs of the blue collar population. Since this group makes up most of the Canadian population they should be the benefactors of more targeted help as the mainstay of the economy.

I would say that is garbage. I would say that we are probably bending over backwards to the disadvantaged and we are missing the greatest population that would have the biggest impact which is the blue collar worker. The norms. We seem to do a lot for the very bright. We do a lot for the very weak but it is the bulk of the crowd there in the middle that we tend to just sort of sit back and say oh well, they'll survive. I think that is the biggest crime because in Canada anyway the biggest bulk of the taxpayers is the blue collar worker and I don't believe that we are doing enough at protecting them as well as the upper and the lower end of the spectrum.

The responses to each of the ten questions for both the student and the teacher participants yield a wide variety of themes and issues. Having put forth the ideas as expressed in the interviews and attempting to address each question one by one, it is now more appropriate to approach the salient issues in a more thematic format. While obviously not every idea will be discussed, a discussion will follow that draws on underlying themes from the responses of participants.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion of Research Findings

Each of the interviews conducted as part of this research study revealed a great deal not only about the individual participants themselves and their life experiences, but also about the nature of the school system and the values that it espouses. The twenty four teacher and student participants came from a wide variety of backgrounds which undoubtedly have influenced, at least in part, their responses to the questions posed. To be sure, however, as a teacher myself, who as a child grew up in a lower socioeconomic home, I must also be affected and shaped by these experiences.

Research can be heavily value laden and in this particular instance, due to the sensitive nature of the subject matter, great efforts have been taken to preserve not only the integrity of the participants themselves, but also the value of their experiences on an individual level. It is never assumed that all students or teachers in the inner city share the experiences noted by these particular interviewees. In fact, it is to be stressed that the individuals who participated in this study are all just that-- individual participants. Their voices lend understanding to the inner city school and its strengths and needs, but they do not provide a definitive description of the inner city school as an entity in and of itself.

As has been previously mentioned, the schools participating in this research study have just completed their first year of operation under the present system. Teachers and administrators from a wide variety of backgrounds and education have come together in less than one year to essentially create a new school community, what must be a very

daunting task. Since reform is often politically and socially motivated, it often brings to bear a range of allegiances and philosophical ideologies about the purpose of schooling and the issues that face schools today. While the first step to any reform or change is often confusion, these schools have undoubtedly begun to come out on the other side. By most accounts teachers, administrators, students and school communities are coming together in a concerted effort to address the needs of their schools. It is hoped that these findings can lend some assistance and direction in those efforts.

Overall perception of the inner city school

Clearly this has been one of the most heated issues for these interviewees as virtually all of them felt that their schools were being treated unfairly by the general community. Rumors of schools out of control, of significant numbers of suspensions, of violence, drugs, and alcohol have been exaggerated by the public. This is not to say, however, that these schools are not confronted with these concerns, as are perhaps all schools, but that they are not the insurmountable problems portrayed by others. Teachers themselves expressed a great deal of frustration with the impression in the community, and also seemingly from within many in the teaching profession, that these schools were creating impossible situations for teachers. While no doubt this past year has been taxing in many respects, as it has been surely in many of the schools in this district due to massive restructuring, many of the teachers report that it has also been rewarding both personally and professionally.

Several of the interviewees referred to the lack of resources they were faced with

in their schools. For many of them, the schools were not adequately equipped with the technological (one teacher reported the school as having only eight computers on-line for a population of over five hundred students) or, more importantly, the human resources. While strides were being made to remedy the problem, several teachers referred to the need for greater access to support personnel who can provide training for the teachers in dealing with issues of poverty. While no one surely is arguing that these problems are unique to the domain of the inner city school, it is felt by the teachers that they are being faced with a greater *number* of these issues. Many of them report feeling overwhelmed at times because their concern for some of the children that they teach is beginning to affect them beyond the confines of the classroom, a situation which is compounded by feelings of inadequacy.

Will an influx of money be their golden goose? Probably not. These schools, as with any potential learning organization, are in need of ideological as well as financial change. "The resources schools need, are not only financial; what schools most require is the commitment of the public to their success in the interests of all children" (Barlow and Robertson, 1994, p. 251). If these schools are to continue to make progress, they are going to both require, and subsequently create, a more positive public attitude toward the inner city school. Their voice will be key to this process.

Several of the teachers also pointed to the reality of the inner city school. With current cultural trends reflecting a passion for 'reality' in television and in other forms of media, it is quite interesting that one of the biggest advantages attributed to the inner city school was what the participants described as the *real* picture it painted of our society.

While many did not seem to dwell on the possible impact of such a statement, its broader implications are astounding. If the inner city school, in their view, speaks to the character of society, it would stand to reason that as a *society*, not as schools, we are largely failing to address the issues of poverty. If these schools reveal unacceptable levels of abuse, and hunger and neglect then surely as a society these problems are not the priority they ought to be. Social programs are currently out of fashion in some political realms, with increased emphasis on economic growth and prosperity. And rightly so, many would argue. That is our chance for development, right? But if said growth and prosperity perpetuate abuse, hunger and neglect in the name of the greater public good, we must begin to question whose good is actually being served.

The teachers interviewed did feel a sense of satisfaction in their schools as communities. They felt that their school was about much more than the statistics on hunger and achievement or even the sports and music accolades. Clearly for them the school had the potential, while it may not be currently achieving the full level of that potential, to become a center of *community* growth. Teachers report having a sense of community among themselves, a view also reflected in the student accounts of teacher laughter and joviality. They want to make a difference in the lives of these children, but as will be further discussed, they often feel powerless to do so.

Students shared many of their teachers' perceptions of their schools. They overwhelmingly reported being happy in their schools and generally felt very safe there. Students discussed having a variety of activities available to them and some felt that they were the envy of other schools because of this. They were also keenly aware of the

negative perceptions associated with their schools and generally concurred with their teachers in stating that these were largely hyperbolic. Their schools are not plagued by violence and drugs, but are, rather, okay places to be.

Perceptions associated with the family

Responses to the various research questions yielded much information about the perceptions associated with the family of a lower socioeconomic background. Many teachers and students had clearly defined images of the attitudes and values of the less fortunate of society, and used these images to shape their understandings of these individuals. The notion of the defective family crept into some answers and was prevalent when discussing reasons for a decreased level of high school graduation and post-secondary participation among the disadvantaged.

When issues surrounding seemingly unmotivated kids were raised, both teachers and students often alluded to the lack of a positive parental influence in the home. Going beyond this, however, some felt that the parents had failed to teach their children right from wrong and to be, through their own example, positive role models. Students 2, 5, 6, and 8 all referred to the primary reason for lower levels of high school graduation among the lower socioeconomic class as a lack of encouragement from the home. If their parents cared more about education, and presumably about their children themselves, the students might have a better opportunity to succeed in high school. If the parents of lower socioeconomic status kids had higher expectations of them, then perhaps the children would strive to fulfill these expectations as would, and do, the children of

advantaged families. Though the students say that there are some exceptions to this rule, they feel, as was previously discussed, that parental influence is perhaps the strongest indicator of students' achievement and desire to achieve. Comments including the following from Student 8 speak volumes:

> Well probably the parents [of the high social class] care a bit more about school for their child. And they try to help them all the time.

Many of the students seemed to attach a lack of parenting skills to those of the lower social class though they did not overtly express such a view. In the same way, Teacher 3 alludes to the biggest disadvantage of working in an inner city school as the lack of parental support. Many teachers, as mentioned, interpreted the lack of parental presence at parent teacher conferences and the difficulty in reaching parents at home as indicators of a lack of interest in their child's education. According to Barlow and Robertson (1994) however, "parents are sometimes scapegoated as uninterested, but just as many are disinclined to become involved with the school, perhaps because of negative memories of their own school days, others because contact with the school usually means discouraging news about the achievement or behavior of their children (p.233).

Whatever the underlying cause, at the end of the day teachers report being faced with lower levels of active parental participation among this particular group. Whether this situation is due to the lack of success they may have experienced themselves in school, to the feeling of intimidation, or to a general lack of interest, educators and the community must find ways to involve all parents in education, not for involvement's

sake, but for the sake of children who have little chance of success without it.

Second language enrollment

The issue of a second language is one that was raised several times by teacher participants. Some of them felt that far too many students, particularly those of disadvantaged backgrounds, are closing off the potential for a second language education by not selecting it as a course option or by dismissing it as irrelevant. One key issue is whether or not the students view learning French as important to their future aspirations. It would seem then, as indicated earlier, that a large number of students do not feel it is directly relevant to them and consequently, not viewing it as a core subject area, do not place enough emphasis on second language in their work. Parents too share this view, say Teachers 2 and 3, and may in fact be the source of such negative attitudes.

> For the students in my class for most of them a lot of the times, most of the times, I do not see the parents [at parent teacher meetings]. They don't come in to ask. That could be due to the subject that is being taught, Core French for example which is not deemed by a lot of parents of lower socioeconomic background as being a viable course.

> It's a negative attitude that sometimes they are bringing from outside. Maybe they are coming from a background where parents themselves did not see much value in learning a second language. Therefore the children are not interested in it. It comes from the fact that because we live in a majority Anglophone area,

and fairly isolated I suppose, they don't really see the value that way either. Very often they just don't see... the way that they see their future they don't see how French fits into that. They don't see the need for French in there because they don't feel they are going to need it anyway.

Second language acquisition is becoming an ever increasing demand in the job market. If these teachers are correct in their assertions that disadvantaged youth and their parents do not see French, or any other second language, as a necessary marketable skill, they are limiting their future education and job potential. Many post-secondary programs require at least basic proficiency in a second language, French being perhaps the most logical of those in Canada.

Teacher 7 discussed the lack of enrollment in the French program at high school, but she also pointed out that this is not due to a lack of ability. More than a dozen of her students were competent second language learners in her view, but still refused to benefit from the option at their high school selection since "they don't see the future". The teachers at the school have discussed with students the implications of their decisions to no avail.

While clearly the issue must be addressed by educators, and second language educators in particular, the problem may be more systemic. A lack of enrollment in French programs may be more symptomatic of a disenfranchisement with a cultural capital not their own. Feeling powerless to effect change in their own lives, disadvantaged youth may be opting for the expected route society deems appropriate for

them. If a higher class capital were more open to them in their pursuits, they may be more willing to take part in the program seeing that they too can benefit from it.

Trust

Issues of trust appeared repeatedly in discussions with teachers throughout the data collection process. As discussed in the previous chapter, several teachers felt that their primary goal for the first year of operation was to gain the trust of students with whom many of them had been completely unfamiliar. This task was complicated however, by the life circumstances that many of them seem to face on a daily basis. Students coming from single parent families and with a low income, according to the teacher respondents, were frequently subjected to hunger, abuse, violence and neglect which made the teachers' task of engaging them in learning, and in school itself, infinitely more difficult. According to Teachers 1 and 9, if the staff was successful in removing the barrier that exists between them and their clients, namely students and their families, they could begin the process of actively engaging them in their education. Teacher 9 asserts that "they are such an angry bunch of kids... They just don't trust us yet." In this light, all students would be well equipped to make informed choices about their education and their futures it ensures.

As most people realize trust is a very complex issue since it often entails the remnants of past experiences. While teachers may work considerably at achieving an environment of trust between themselves and their students, it must be taken into consideration that such a relationship develops over time and is the product of a lot of

hard work even in what may often be interpreted as failure. The results, though, will prove to be far reaching and will outlast the in-school years.

Perceptions of the inner city child

Throughout the interview process with teachers and students many of the participants highlighted what appear to be, in their views, common characteristics of the inner city and often disadvantaged child. While most of the student participants did feel that the individual is the determining force in deciding future endeavors, they also seemed to indicate that many disadvantaged youth do not consider themselves to be capable of improving their lot in life. Students 3 and 7 both referred to a lack of self confidence as being one of the key triggers to a lack of motivation in disadvantaged youth. Self esteem poses a major hindrance to the marginalized sector of society as a sense of powerlessness creeps into their existence.

Two of the teacher interviewees felt that very often the inner city child is characterized by a lack of motivation and interest in doing well. They appear to be frustrated at the apparent laissez faire attitude of many of their students in the domain of education, including extra curricular activities. As earlier discussed, Teacher 4 noted the low commitment as being a casualty of importance placed on social relationships with their peers.

In terms of the extra-curricular you know it seems that for the lower socioeconomic kids a lot of them are less involved in extra-curricular and even in terms of tutorials. You know it is not convenient for their schedules, they might

miss talking to someone at the bus stop, you know god forbid they should stay an extra half-hour to get some help. I mean they talk a good game but when it comes to following through they just don't have the concept that they should be doing it.

While clearly, for Teacher 4 at least, the conflict exists between academic work and social lives, for several of the other teachers interviewed the relevant factor is not lack of interest but age. In the view of Teacher 1 the inner city child is no different than any other teenager who deems himself to be invincible. Consequences are often the furthest things from their minds which can be prone to making poor or uninformed choices. A child's social class status is not the mitigating factor in the equation for this teacher.

Teacher 6 concurs with this assertion pointing out that age is influential in determining attitudes toward schooling and for the inner city child it is further complicated by the often challenging lives that they deal with. For this teacher, their apparent resistance to active learning is not a conscientious decision on their part, but more of a symptom of their life circumstances.

To be sure, it cannot be denied that teenagers everywhere resist authority and test their limits. The inner city child is no different. Right? Since the teachers differ in their views, it would be difficult to make a general assertion, but it obvious that for at least some of the interviewees the inner city child has less participation in extra curricular events and is more hesitant to come for extra help after school hours. Could financial

issues be impacting on their decisions to try out for a school team? As Teacher 1 pointed out, he was unable to collect the total amount of $100 for twenty uniforms over the course of the year. Each student was required to pay five dollars, but for almost half of them this proved to be too much. Since teams often travel to tournaments, transportation and spending money may also be a concern. Of course teachers tell the kids not to worry about it; if they can't pay the school will cover the cost yet their efforts are sometimes thwarted since the school can only do so if they *know* the student is not getting involved because they can't pay. If the student does not try out for a team to avoid the issue then there is nothing that well meaning teachers can do.

No one can say for sure if there are lower participation levels in extra curricular activities among inner city kids, and certainly there are more options available than sports in most schools. Why won't they stay behind and ask for help? Sure, it could be a complete lack of interest and motivation but could it not also be a sense of powerlessness to change their circumstances? If schools hope to reach these kids, if in fact their levels of participation are shown to be lower, they are going to first have to address the reasons for such a situation. Give students a voice in the process and allow them the opportunity to identify the reasons accounting for their absence. What may often appear to be a choice, since all interested parties are permitted to join extra curricular activities, in actual fact is not. Students and families cannot possibly choose between team uniforms and travel expense and food and clothing. For some students in this province, this may sadly be the 'choice' they are faced with.

Another issue stemming from this is the fact that for many schools the way in

which they try to engage 'at-risk' students is through alternate activities outside the regular school hours. If schools attempt to reach disadvantaged youth by offering more extra curricular options, and if this group of students does not take advantage of such opportunities, one other approach has failed. Achieving success in music or sport or other domains can be a very powerful experience for someone who thought themselves incapable of change. For many inner city children who are plagued by low self-esteem it can prove to be the deciding factor that empowers them to become an active learner.

Teacher burnout

The teachers who participated in this study had just completed what must have been a very challenging year for many teachers in the district. Faced with mass restructuring and reconfiguration of schools and school zones, many teachers and students in the district attended new schools in the fall of 1999. For both of the schools involved in this study, the year had been especially difficult since they were essentially completely new schools. Neither one had previously existed as is in the district. The cooperation of parents and teachers was a vital element of the successful implementation of the plan and for the most part this proved to be the case.

Teachers, who at the time of being interviewed were in the last weeks of the school year, were feeling the effects of a year of challenge and a newness unfamiliar to them. New schools bring with them new administrators, new staff and students, new families, and a whole new set of expectations. The challenge for any school community is to gel all of these backgrounds and expectations into a school that works *on its own*

terms. There is no doubt that these two schools are well on their way to accomplishing just that, but they've had a few bumps along the way.

The nature of these difficulties, and the reasons for them, are complex to say the least and are perhaps unique to each particular school. A school's culture takes time to develop and will be a product of all of its stakeholders, not only those found immediately within the physical confines of the classroom. The teachers interviewed report feeling tired as they have not felt in previous years. Starting a school from scratch is no easy task. At the end of the year, though, most of them note that their school has made considerable progress in approaching its goals. The staff and students note a very positive, almost electrifying, energy in the school. But this takes hard work and joint commitment, and the teachers are now feeling mentally exhausted.

Perhaps one of the most difficult challenges for many of the interviewees this year was being able to separate their own private home lives from students' life stories . Many of the teachers described spending personal money buying supplies for their students, but their level of caring goes much beyond that. They report thinking about their students at night, wondering if they are safe and being cared for. While certainly not all of their students are in such situations, there do seem to be enough of them that it causes much pause for the teachers. Teacher 5 noted that she has never felt like she has had to play so many diverse roles before. Seeing one particular student in her class who worked nights at a hotdog stand in the downtown area, and being faced with his exhaustion in the classroom made it extremely difficult for her to put concerns about the student's welfare aside at the end of the school day. "In recent years, for example,

teachers have had to address a growing array of social problems which their students bring to the classroom, taking on what are essentially welfare and health responsibilities, in addition to coping with many fundamental changes in the curriculum" (Royal Commission, 1994, p.259).

Teacher 3 also echoed similar sentiments, voicing the opinion that the roles teachers are expected to fulfill are currently unrealistic with additional responsibilities being allocated to them on a regular basis. Whether teachers assume these responsibilities on their own, or they are imposed upon them by the school board, the department of education, or by society is not known. In any case, the fact remains that teachers are feeling overworked. "Many teachers resent the downloading of social responsibility on schools, demands for which many feel unsuited or unprepared, particularly when how well teachers play the roles of substitute parents or social workers is considered irrelevant to their evaluation by the public" (Barlow and Robertson, 1994, p.122).

This is not to say, however, that these teachers have given up in their desire to create an effective school for their communities. They report calling all parents on their list to ensure their attendance at parent teacher night, making weekly progress calls to parents, and devoting incredible amounts of time to extra curricular events and activities. Faced with increased burdens and responsibilities these teachers are facing the challenge head on. The following comments from Teacher1 indicate the stuff these teachers are made of.

When the strike was on one year we had a maintenance strike on so teachers were

paid but we were not allowed in the schools for three weeks. I spent the whole three weeks going to every kid's house that I taught, a lot of them living in disadvantaged areas. I just got up in the morning at 9:00 and I started knocking on doors. That year I taught about two hundred students and I got to one hundred and twenty houses and it's great.

Not to be easily deterred these teachers will definitely fight to build a positive learning and working environment. The challenge for the system is to have enough supports in place, both financially and otherwise, to give these teachers the momentum they need to keep going in the face of adversity and heartbreak. Since many of them note that they often wonder whether or not their efforts will come to fruition, it is key that the school system not fall prey to well meaning but seriously overworked teachers.

Powerlessness

'Empowerment' must be one of pop culture's favorite buzz words. Self-improvement experts are claiming to have the secret to empowerment, to give those of us who need to be in control of our own destinies the wherewithal to do it. But alas, no bottled remedy has yet been found. Teachers and students report feelings of powerlessness when discussing changing the status quo of society, of making a life for oneself that reflects one's desires and not one's limitations.

Researchers (Giroux and Shannon, 1997; Clauset and Gaynor, 1982) have long studied the feelings of teachers with regard to their ability to be agents of change in the

lives of their students. Giroux and Shannon (1997) report that "their teachers were at a loss as to how to bridge this huge gulf between lived experience outside the school and the formal requirement of participation and achievement in the classroom" (p.133).

Undoubtedly, the most difficult thing for teachers and schools is being able to decide at what point have they done all that they can do. How do schools even begin to break down the low self esteem barriers that exist for so many inner city kids? How do they begin to combat the *students'* own feelings of powerlessness, that they will wind up like their parents so why bother in the first place. Teachers 4 and 5 and also Student 7 (who spoke about post-secondary education) all refer to the sense of things spinning out of control for disadvantaged children and that something else, perhaps all of society, is in charge of their destinies.

How to deal with this lack of empowerment? Clearly schools cannot be the sole agent for the disadvantaged. It goes much beyond the realm of the school system to right the wrongs of society. So where does this leave us? With a major problem and no solution? Not likely, but it certainly cannot be the sole responsibility of the schools to fix a problem that generations of society have created.

Working toward a solution

This research study has probably raised more questions than it has answered. The issues related to the poverty question are numerous and hard-hitting to be sure. As a teacher myself, it has been difficult and at the same time quite revealing to undertake such an introspective look at the findings of this study. Undoubtedly taking a critical

evaluation of one's work can be a very daunting and risky endeavor since it places all shareholders in the system in a vulnerable situation. Laying blame is not part of my mandate. Of critical importance is that teachers, schools, and members of the larger school community take an honest appraisal of their perceptions of their students and assess for themselves whether or not they feel there is room for growth and knowledge.

Ultimately, in an effort at finding a solution to the complex issues facing the disadvantaged family, naming the problem for what it actually is proves to be the all important first step. It is crucial to the success of any change effort to recognize these issues as one of poverty and *not* merely a school issue. The fact that children are arriving at and subsequently leaving school without questioning the way in which society is structured, without being able to recognize the disadvantage with which they have been faced, is a failure in and of itself. But it would be unfair, and most certainly incorrect, to lay the blame for this dismal fact solely with the school system. Could schools be doing more? Almost assuredly yes. But they are also faced with the daily realities of children who do not have enough to eat, who have suffered abuse and neglect, whose parents may not have developed good parenting skills.

The issue facing schools is that they ultimately are dealing with the symptoms of the problem rather than facing the problem itself. Consider the educator who struggles to teach Johnny how to read, spending countless hours reviewing sight words and learning phonetics. Johnny does not have a great deal of success in spite of his teacher's many efforts and growing sense of frustration and self doubt. The teacher can spend all the time she wants trying to address his reading difficulties but if Johnny needs glasses her

efforts, however well intentioned and admirable, will not yield results because they do not target the problem. Similarly, teachers and educators all across the province and country are dealing with alarming numbers of school age children who are being raised in poverty and unless we name the challenge as a poverty issue and not a poor education system we will be cheating not only schools but the children who deserve so much more.

Conclusion

There would be much folly in allowing schools to shoulder the responsibility for the ills of a society, indeed for what a society has created. If our lives as a people are based on the premise that the value one contributes to society is often determined on salary and social status, then it would be illogical to expect schools, the mirror of society and its values, to teach anything but. If we have created schools to reflect our values as a culture we must expect it to do just that, and sadly in our society right now the interests of those marginalized in society are not highly valued.

Poverty is a social issue, it is not a school issue. In order to have any hope of eradicating the often devastating effects of poverty, we must be willing to first identify the problem for what it is and secondly, as a society, not only as a school, to effect *systemic* change. Schools can be very effective and far reaching mechanisms for change. In this light, schools are an essential element of the solution, but cannot possibly embody the entire solution.

Health care professionals along with educators and justice officials are all grappling with issues associated with poverty in their own piecemeal fashion. Most

would agree, however, due to the staggering numbers of children living in poverty today, that their efforts have been largely unsuccessful. Reasons for this could be widespread, but may stem from the fact that efforts are directed toward the results of poverty and not toward the cause itself. Rather than dealing with young offenders as 'troubled teens' and inner city school children as 'unmotivated', it is time to realize that these issues are manifestations of the life circumstances disadvantaged children deal with on a daily basis. It is not a Hollywood movie that ends happily ever after with kids miraculously being saved from themselves. It is real life and many of these children are falling between the cracks.

Many of the teachers and students in this study referred to the cycle of poverty as a terrible disadvantage, and a truly unfortunate one, but some of them also implied elements of blame for those in the situation for not trying hard enough to get out. Let it be very clear. Poverty is a circumstance. It is not inherent in the individual. To assume otherwise is tragic for these kids. Let's work together, without fear of accountability or playing the blame game, to break the glass ceiling for the disadvantaged. Surely, they deserve nothing less.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study into the nature of teacher perceptions of disadvantaged youth, the following recommendations are offered to aid in the future research of the topic as well as in the efforts on behalf of these two schools, and indeed any others, in improving their intervention strategies to reach the marginalized students

in their community. Recommendations one through thirteen are direct implications of this research study, while numbers fourteen through twenty are more indirectly related to the research findings.

1. Further research ought to be conducted into the possible relationship between socioeconomic status and academic achievement levels. Both schools and the provincial Department of Education should conduct research on relationships between a student's socioeconomic and academic success.

2. This study questioned whether disadvantaged youth consider post secondary university education as a viable option for them. It is recommended that a more in-depth study consider this question, determine whether it has any basis in reality in our schools, and if so, determine why such a perception exists in order to put forth effective strategies for eradicating such detrimental views.

3. Parental voice would prove to be an enlightening one in a similar study of this kind. Future research into this topic would benefit from a more involved participation of the parents specifically into how they perceive the school as addressing poverty issues and to how they perceive a teacher's expectations of children of differing backgrounds.

4. In three to five years a more in-depth study exploring how these two schools as communities have attempted to address issues of poverty, and the impact it has on teaching and learning would prove useful. Such a study should explore changing perceptions among teachers and students as compared to those of the initial research group.

5. It is recommended that research be conducted to evaluate the notion of some

educators and students in this study that students of lower socioeconomic backgrounds may have lower enrollment levels in second language programs. Where such low enrollment does exist, it would prove useful to determine if socioeconomic status in any way relates to success in the program and to identify possible causes and impacts of such a situation.

6. There is a substantial need for increased collaboration between the Department of Health and Community Services, the Department of Education and the schools within the system to collectively devise strategies to identify 'at-risk' students and from there to implement support measures to minimize the drastic effects of poverty on the education of these children.

7. An increased number of social workers should be placed within the school system, particularly to those schools in the inner city and other identified areas which may be affected by increased poverty and low income among families. Such intervention is intended to be a preventive measure to many of the side effects of poverty.

8. Government ought to subsidize all school fees (including music fees, sports registration fees, copy services, etc.) in text book allowances for recipients of Social Services benefits and others who may demonstrate such a need.

9. Schools and volunteer community organizations should work cooperatively to coordinate the effective use of the gymnasium, music, and theater arts facilities during evenings and weekends to attempt to actively engage as many youth as possible in all aspects of school life.

10. School councils should establish funds to be made available to students

demonstrating need to cover fees required for participation in various extra-curricular events including travel, uniform rental etc.

11. Since several teachers noted issues of hunger in their schools all schools in the province should offer both breakfast and hot lunch programs at either a reduced fee or free of charge to those requiring such services.

12. School councils should be actively engaged in promoting the successes, both academic and otherwise, of its school to the community at large. Such initiatives could include invitations for members of the community, not necessarily parents of students at the school, to attend various events including Remembrance Day celebrations, Christmas concert, etc. Honor rolls could also be published in community bulletins of local newspapers.

13. Teachers should make a concerted effort to make the initial contact between the home and school on a positive note if possible. Examples might include a written or oral invitation to attend the Curriculum Night at the beginning of the school year. While it is realized that teachers are often overwhelmed at the beginning of the new school year, it is felt that this initial communication could go a long way toward bridging the gap between home and school and establishing a positive rapport in a non-threatening way.

14. Through community health organizations a series of informative classes be offered/expanded that focuses on the importance of early childhood education and the improvement of literary skills among all sectors of the population. Classes could be coordinated using the expertise of the Provincial Public Libraries.

15. Teacher education programs should offer as required core subjects methods of identifying characteristics of 'at-risk' children and accommodations or interventions that can be implemented to specifically address their needs.

16. Teacher education programs should include courses that explore the challenges faced by underprivileged children and minorities and the increased potential for difficulties with which they are confronted. If educators are to play a role in changing the marginal status of the disadvantaged they must first be educated about the reality of poverty and the far reaching ramifications it entails.

17. That both pre-service and in-service programs for teachers include methods of identifying symptoms of stress as well as ways of managing stress effectively.

18. School libraries and classrooms should be equipped with a wide variety of reading materials that target all reading levels and interests that are available to students and their parents. Such resources are a direct attempt to attract students and parents who might otherwise be hesitant to become involved in the school.

19. That all school libraries be equipped with reference material for parents that explores effective parenting skills as well as strategies for homework help and organization skills.

20. The school board and/or Department of Education should launch a public relations campaign to address the widespread accessibility of second language instruction and its far-reaching benefits and cross-curricular skills base.

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Appendix

(Letters of Consent)

Letter for Permission: School District

Y Street
Mount Pearl, NF
ZOZ OZO

Mr. Brian Shortall
Director of Education
Avalon East School Board
Atlantic Place
St. John's, NF

Dear Mr. Shortall:

I am a graduate student from Memorial University of Newfoundland and am actively engaged in completing my masters program in Educational Leadership. I have completed all of the necessary course work and have conducted research on my topic. I am ready to commence my thesis and am requesting your consent to interview a total of twelve teachers and twelve students within the Avalon East School District on my topic "The Relationship Between Socioeconomic Status and Schooling Experiences".

Briefly, I want to study the role of students' socioeconomic status in creating teacher expectations and its influence on pedagogy and would like to get their insight on the potential challenges to education in the inner city area. Consent will be sought from the school administrators, as well as from the individual teacher and student participants with the understanding that the participants may refuse to participate and may refuse to answer any question if they so desire. The interviews will be conducted outside the normal working hours of the school day. It is my hope that the results of this study will provide me with important information that will assist in my future teaching endeavours

within this district.

If you wish to discuss my proposal in detail, I may be contacted at 111-1111, or you may wish to contact my thesis supervisor Dr. Clar Doyle at 737-7556. If at any time you wish to speak with a resource person not associated with this study, please contact Dr. Bruce Sheppard, Associate Dean of Graduate Programmes & Research Development at Memorial University, 737-3402. Thank you for your anticipated cooperation. Sincerely,

Mabel Nash

Letter for Permission: School Administrator

Y Street
Mount Pearl, NF
ZOZ OZO

Mr/Ms X
Principal
School X
St. John's, NF

Dear Mr./ Ms X:

I am a graduate student from Memorial University of Newfoundland and am actively engaged in completing my masters program in Educational Leadership. I have completed all of the necessary course work and have conducted research on my topic. I am ready to commence my thesis and am requesting your consent to interview a total of six teachers and six students (preferably two at each grade level) within School X on my topic "The Relationship Between Socioeconomic Status and Schooling Experiences".

Briefly, I want to study the role of students' socioeconomic status in creating teacher expectations and its influence on pedagogy and would like to get their insight on the potential challenges to education in the inner city area.

As part of this research study there will be a random selection of student participants who will be interviewed. They will be asked questions relating to any possible impact they may perceive that social class has on treatment of discipline issues, programming, and grading, as well as perceptions of any possible advantages and disadvantages that social class might afford an individual in school. All such questions are not in any way directed toward a specific individual teacher and are in general terms

only. The concept of exactly what constitutes social class will be explained to the students before they begin the interview.

Consent has been obtained from the Avalon East School District, as will be obtained from the individual teacher and student participants (for whom parental permission will also be required) with the understanding that the participants may refuse to participate and may refuse to answer any question if they so desire. The interviews will be conducted outside the normal working hours of the school day at a time and place of convenience for both parties and will require approximately thirty minutes to one hour for each participant. It is my hope that the results of this study will provide me with important information that will assist in my future teaching endeavours within this district.

Please find attached a copy of the materials to be used in this study. If you wish to discuss my proposal in detail, I may be contacted at 111-1111, or you may wish to contact my thesis supervisor Dr. Clar Doyle at 737-7556. If at any time you wish to speak with a resource person not associated with this study, please contact Dr. Bruce Sheppard, Associate Dean of Graduate Programmes & Research Development at Memorial University, 737-3402. Thank you for your anticipated cooperation.
Sincerely,

Mabel Nash

Memo to Teachers

May, 2000

Dear teacher,

I am a graduate student at Memorial University of Newfoundland and am currently conducting research as part of my thesis entitled "The Relationship Between Socioeconomic Status and Schooling Experiences". Briefly, I want to study the role of students' socioeconomic status on teacher expectations and pedagogy. I would like to get insight from teachers on how a student's social class might impact the schooling experience as they see it. Participants should have teaching experiences in the inner city school setting and in at least one other type of school setting (i.e. rural, sub-urban, or other urban settings). Participation in this study is completely voluntary and would be appreciated.

I am hoping that you will agree to a taped interview session that will take approximately thirty minutes to one hour to complete so that I can use these responses as part of the data for my thesis paper. Each interview will take place at a time and place of mutual convenience. All information gathered for this study will be kept confidential and the participants' identity will remain anonymous. All interview tapes will be securely stored and will be destroyed when they are no longer needed for the purposes of this study. School personnel will not have any access to the data collected as part of this research study. This study has been approved by the Office of Research Ethics Review Committee at Memorial University of Newfoundland.

As part of this research study there will also be a random selection of student participants who will be interviewed. They will be asked questions relating to any possible impact social class may have on treatment of discipline issues, programming, and grading, as well as perceptions of any possible advantages and disadvantages that social class might afford an individual in school. All such questions are not in any way directed toward a specific individual teacher and are in general terms only. The concept of exactly what constitutes social class will be explained to the students before they begin the interview.

I request that you sign the attached Consent Form and return it to me at your earliest convenience. From those returned forms, six will be chosen at random (two per grade level) to participate in the study. Should you have any further questions or concerns please feel free to contact me either by phone 111-1111 or by e-mail at mmnash@stemnet.nf.ca.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Mabel Nash

Graduate Student

Educational Leadership

Faculty of Education

Memo to Parents

May, 2000

Dear parents,

    I am a graduate student at Memorial University of Newfoundland and am currently conducting research as part of my thesis entitled "The Relationship Between Socioeconomic Status and Schooling Experiences". Briefly, I want to study the role of students' social class on teacher expectations and pedagogy. I would like to get insight from students on how social class might impact the schooling experience as they see it. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and would be appreciated.

    I am hoping that your child will agree to a taped interview session that will take approximately thirty minutes to one hour to complete so that I can use these responses as part of the data for my thesis paper. Each interview will take place at a time and place of mutual convenience. All information gathered for this study will be kept confidential and the participants' identity will remain anonymous. However, *upon a request* for an interview to be conducted in pairs (i.e. two students at a time) such confidentiality cannot be fully guaranteed. All interview tapes will be securely stored and will be destroyed when they are no longer needed for the purposes of this study. School personnel will not have any access to the data collected as part of this research study. This study has been approved by the Office of Research Ethics Review Committee at Memorial University of Newfoundland.

    I request that you sign the attached Consent Form and return it to me at your

earliest convenience. From those returned forms, six will be chosen at random (two per grade level) to participate in the study. Should you have any further questions or concerns please feel free to contact me either by phone 111-1111 or by e-mail at mmnash@stemnet.nf.ca.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Mabel Nash

Graduate Student

Educational Leadership

Faculty of Education

Consent Form: Teacher

I, _____, hereby consent to participate in Mabel
Nash's thesis project titled "The Relationship Between Socioeconomic Status and
Schooling Experiences" and to being one of the individuals interviewed in that study.
I understand:

    a. that any information gathered in this study will be used for educational
    purposes only

    b. that my participation in this study is voluntary and anonymous

    c. that I have the right to refuse responding to any question that I wish

    d. that I have the right to withdraw from this interview at any time

    e. that I have the right to refuse having the interview session taped

    f. that confidentiality will be maintained within the limits of laws governing
    disclosure

    g. that the interview will take place at a time and place of mutual convenience
    and will take approximately thirty minutes to one hour.

_____

Signature of Consenting Teacher

_____

Signature of Researcher

Consent Form: Student

I, _____, hereby consent to participate in Mabel Nash's

thesis project titled "The Relationship Between Socioeconomic Status and Schooling

Experiences" and to being one of the individuals interviewed in that study.

I understand:

    a. that any information gathered in this study will be used for educational

    purposes only;

    b. that my participation in this study is voluntary

    c. that I have the right to refuse responding to any question that I wish

    d. that I have the right to withdraw from this interview at any time

    e. that I may refuse to have the interview session taped

    f. that anonymity and confidentiality cannot be ensured in the case of interviews

    conducted in pairs

    g. that school personnel will not have any access to the data obtained during the

    interview

    h. that interview tapes, should they be permitted, will be securely stored during

    the study and will be destroyed thereafter

    i. that confidentiality will be maintained within the limits of laws governing

    disclosure

    j. that the interview will take place at a time and place of mutual convenience

    and will take approximately thirty minutes to one hour.

_____

Signature of Consenting Student

_____

Signature of Parent Granting Student Permission (Required for All Student Participants)

_____

Signature of Researcher