

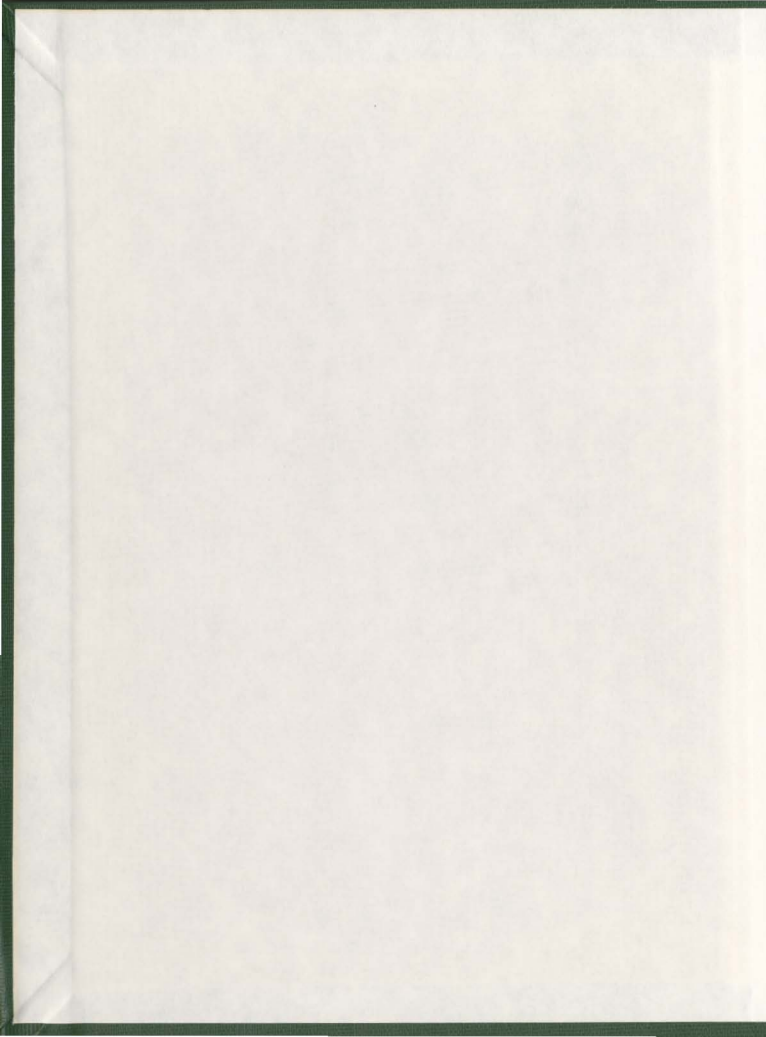
A DISCUSSION OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN
INTEGRATING SHAKESPEARE'S *Romeo and Juliet*
INTO THE JUNIOR HIGH LANGUAGE ARTS
CURRICULUM TO LOWER ACHIEVING
GRADE NINE STUDENTS

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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**A Discussion of Parental Involvement in Integrating Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* into the
Junior High Language Arts Curriculum to Lower Achieving Grade Nine Students**

by

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Abstract

Advocates of parental involvement recognize the tremendous potential that exists when the home and school cooperate but effective partnership is actually minimal, due mainly to the need for useful, organized information on parental involvement. This project monitored the development of a *Romeo and Juliet* unit of work to two grade nine classes at the John Cabot Junior High (pseudonym). Individualized activities were introduced to seven low achievers and, through a home-school collaborative effort, an attempt was made to improve the active learning of these students.

The results of this project indicated that both parents and students found the unit of work to be satisfactory and that the strategies introduced were adequate for meeting the project's expectations, and thus increasing the students' school success. Basically the problems that occurred related mainly to ineffective communication between the parties concerned, but once the parents realized that the focus of the involvement was their children's success, they were willing to work through any obstacle and view it as an inevitable inconvenience in any learning experience. It was noted that the students, though there was a significant improvement in their learning skills, did not generally view the home-school cooperation as a partnership but as a teacher-directed initiative that would ensure their homework was completed.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
CHAPTER 1	
INTRODUCTION	1
Definitions	1
Project Background and Rationale	4
Expected Outcomes	8
Problems Addressed by the Project	10
CHAPTER TWO	
LITERATURE REVIEW OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT	13
Summary	16
CHAPTER THREE	
ROMEO AND JULIET UNIT OF WORK	18
Caring as a Strategy	19
The Project's Activities	21
June, 1999	23
September, 1999	23
October 1-15, 1999	28
October 18-30, 1999	29
November, 1999	33
January, 2000	34
February, 2000	39
March, 2000	42
April, 2000	44
May, 2000	47
A <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> Web Page	50
Adapting Activity to Circumstances	51
Anger Management	53
Parent-Student Reading Partnerships	54
CHAPTER FOUR	
A CRITICAL, REFLECTIVE JOURNAL	59

CHAPTER FIVE	
EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT	68
Student Profile	68
Parental Involvement	69
Medium of Contact	71
Parental Satisfaction	71
Student Satisfaction	72
Input of Teachers and Other Personnel	72
The Project's Activities	73
Student Achievement	74
The Writer's Satisfaction	75
Summary	75
CHAPTER SIX	
RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS	77
Recommendations	77
Conclusions	85
REFERENCES	88
APPENDIX A	
Copy of Intent Form	95
APPENDIX B	
Profiles of Project's Students	96
APPENDIX C	
Family Profile	102
APPENDIX D	
Post-Questionnaire for Parents and Students	104

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 - Professional Assumption Grid	26
Figure 2 - Pro-social Skills for School Success	36
Figure 3 - The <i>Wait</i> Strategy for Dealing with Anger Appropriately	37
Figure 4 - Self-monitoring Sheet for Dealing with Anger	37
Figure 5 - Sample Action Plan Chart	46
Figure 6 - How Has Your Thinking Changed	48
Figure 7 - Criteria for Evaluating Novels that Feature Characters with Disabilities	57
Figure 8 - Reading Partnership Agreement	57

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Definitions

The terminology used in this project is not intended to be definitive. The meanings are included here to assist the reader in understanding these terms as they are used in the context of this paper.

ISSP An Individual Support Services Plan is a summary of relevant information regarding the child and the program which s/he will be following. The ISSP generally includes the adaptations, curriculum, support and/or services which are specifically targeted to the child as a result of the support services planning process. The ISSP is a long-term planning tool which, over time, becomes a record of the child's accomplishments.

The definition above was taken from the *Model for the Coordination of Services to Children and Youth With Special Needs in Newfoundland and Labrador* (Department of Education, Health, Social Services and Justice, 1996, p.4).

Learning Strategies:

They are the tools and techniques we use to help ourselves understand and learn new material or skills; integrate this new information with what we already know in a way that makes sense; and recall the information or skill later, even in a different situation or place. Our strategies include what we think about (e.g., planning before writing, realizing when we are not understanding something we are reading, remembering what we have learned previously on the topic under study) and what we physically do (e.g., taking notes, re-reading to clear up confusion, making a chart, table, or story map to capture the most important information). Research has shown that using knowledge about learning strategies, including which strategies to use in different situations, can help make students more effective, purposeful, and independent learners.

The preceding definition has been taken from the News Digest called *Interventions for Students with Learning Disabilities* (1997), published by the National Information Centre for Children and Youth with Disabilities and is available at the site-
<http://www.nichey.org/pubs/bibliog/bib14txt.htm>.

Lower Achieving Students:

The maladjusted, the mentally retarded, the physically handicapped, at risk students, those with visual or auditory impairment and specific learning difficulties are some of the various terms used to categorize children who do not adapt well to the regular

classroom setting. Though this paper will use other terms like special education, learning differences, or learning disabilities, it should be understood that reference is being made to students who are not performing as well as could be expected from their intellectual or verbal maturity. The writer realizes that the particular circumstances of each individual child are unique and to effectively teach students with special needs, educators must attempt to determine the needs of specific children in relation to their specific circumstances, and special needs are determined in terms of what the child requires beyond those normally required for all children (Cunningham & Davis, 1985, p.1).

Parental Involvement:

There are many forms of parental involvement, such as volunteering at the school or sitting on boards, councils, or committees. The main focus of parental involvement in this paper, however, will be on parents involved with the school system in the education of their child through learning activities in the home.

Pathways: Pathways is a program that categorizes students into one of five individualized components:

Pathway 1 - Provincially Prescribed Curriculum

Students whose strengths and needs do not present any reason for concern, and receive instruction in the regular curriculum through routine classroom practices and materials.

Pathway 2 - Provincially Prescribed Curriculum with Support

In this Pathway one would categorize two types of students:

- (a) Those who are not achieving with the general instructional methodologies.
- (b) Those who are unchallenged by the general instructional methodologies.

These students are still dealing with the regular curriculum but may need specific strategies to meet their needs. The largest group in the Pathway 2 would be students who are having some difficulty with learning concepts or attaining new skills and require some sort of remedial help. It has been suggested that the needs of all students in the Pathways 2 be met by the regular classroom teacher.

Pathway 3 - Modified Courses

In this group are students who are unable to find success with the curriculum as written and therefore require changes to the outcomes of subjects or courses. It is intended that some outcomes be deleted or added. However, students will study all existing topics and objectives related to the program but at a reduced or extended level of depth. Students in Pathway 3 will be typically those who are identified as non-categorical special education which requires that an identified exceptionality be verified through comprehensive assessment.

Pathway 4 - Alternate Courses

This Pathway is designed for students who are experiencing significant learning difficulty to the extent that completely individualized courses or subjects are necessary.

Pathway 5 - Alternate Curriculum

This category will service students who are severely mentally handicapped and require the development of a full program which is not based on the provincial curriculum.

The above model was taken from the Newfoundland and Labrador Teacher's Association pamphlet: *The Crisis in Student Support - Call for Action on Special Matters: A Report of the Review of Special Education* (1999, pp.4-5). The information came from the document *Programming for Individual Needs: Pre-referral Intervention* published in 1997 by the Department of Education's Division of Student Support Services.

Project Background and Rationale

The way schools care about children is reflected in the way schools care about the children's families. If educators view children simply as *students*, they are likely to see the family as separate from the school...If educators view students as children, they are likely to see both the family and community as partners with the school in the children's education and development. (p. 701)

— Joyce L. Epstein (1995)

Changes in the family structure, increasing needs of children, greater demands from society, and government cutbacks that resulted in larger classes with fewer teachers have all contributed to putting stress and strain on the education system in Newfoundland and Labrador. The inclusion of special education students in mainstream classrooms has resulted in even greater responsibilities for teachers. Schools alone cannot do an adequate job of preparing our most precious resource for the future. It is imperative, therefore, to search elsewhere for alternative strategies to cope with burgeoning duties and to take advantage of the resource of those most interested in children—their parents—in new and innovative ways. In the case of students who are lower achievers it will be both economical and efficient for professionals to share their skills with these parents.

The author, with some twenty-seven years teaching experience, has been disillusioned with a system that places far too much value on marks and too little on actual learning. What today's teachers are expected to know and do has increased in amount and complexity. An initial decision to pursue a Master's Degree three years ago was based on the author's awareness of the value of professional development in advancing student learning. Primarily, for the practical experience it offers, the writer has chosen the project route for the completion of a Master's Program.

Deciding upon a specific focus for the project was a much more difficult task. Though nothing has captured the imagination and interest of educators as has computer use in the classroom, there are

other sources that educators can avail of to promote improved learning. The decision to concentrate on parental involvement to help lower achieving students in literature is based on the author's recent experience with the inclusion of students taking modified courses in his classroom.

Teaching with literature has many advocates as well as advantages. The more whole text that students read, the more their reading improves (Anderson et al., 1985). The language of literature is more natural and predictable (Goodman, 1988). Tunnel (1998) found that children perceive reading to be more of a meaning-related activity, and will demonstrate an improvement in attitude. Perhaps, most important of all, literature offers models of ethical responsibility, inspiration, aesthetic experiences, and social cohesion (May, 1998).

The project being reported on describes the teaching of *Romeo and Juliet* to lower achieving students with particular emphasis on those who have learning difficulties within an heterogeneous class setting. The *Teacher's Guide* recognizes that to bring Shakespeare to life in the classroom, the teacher should commit to a student-centered approach. Teachers should help students develop a basic understanding of the play, and focus on Shakespeare's work as a vehicle to a lifelong appreciation of the power of language, rather than on an in-depth analysis of a classic. Ferguson (1997) also stressed the importance of adapting the reading program to the needs of the child. Baker, Afflerbach, & Reinking (1996) maintained that, "The ideal reading interaction is one that is sensitive to the child's emerging and changing competencies and interests" (p.17).

According to Applebee (1993), *Romeo and Juliet* continues to be one of the most popular book-length pieces of literature at the secondary level in U.S. schools. Adams (1995) offered three reasons why Shakespeare can be an enriching literary experience, even for poor readers. First, the story of young love and family conflict has timeless appeal. Second, *Romeo and Juliet* belongs to a body of cultural

knowledge that is important to students (Hirsh, 1987). Finally, the play offers opportunities for the development of what Heath (1991) called the literate behaviors of interpreting, reflecting, discussing, and questioning.

Miller (1999) suggested that dealing with a classroom of vigorous junior high students can be an intense and demanding enterprise. She noted that the daily activities can exhaust a teacher to the point where it becomes difficult to find the time to objectively consider what he/she is doing, to question why we are doing it, and to analyze if we are on the right track. Compounding the problem, she suspected that too frequently the act of including lower achieving students in the classroom becomes an end in itself, without regard to whether it is good for the student or their classmates.

Coutinho (1995) reported that in the United States in the last sixteen years there was a 200 percent increase in the number of students labeled as learning disabled. Canning (1996) reported that this same trend is occurring in Newfoundland. She realized that while lower achieving students are found in most classrooms, few educators have a sufficient understanding of them to identify students with a learning disability or design an appropriate program for them. Though research is contributing to our understanding of the nature and causes of low achievement, she contended that the problem is very complex and requires a variety of approaches to remediation.

One of the issues that is receiving increasing attention is meeting the needs of lower achieving students in the regular classroom. Traditional classroom-based instructional practices where the teacher tends to direct the learning process through the skill and drill method, the lecture method, or by using worksheets may yield less than desirable results for students identified as lower achievers (Baker & Zigmond, 1990; McIntosh, Vaughn, Schumm, Haager, & Lee, 1993). Farrell and Elkins (1995) suggested that "any learner who experiences significant difficulty in literacy should receive guided

assistance in tasks associated with their individual learning program” (p.273).

Kubina and Cooper (2000) contended that in an inclusive school “the master teacher will reorganize the regular classroom to fit the learning needs of all students, both general and special education, so as to discover and direct instruction and practice toward the unique characteristics of each student” (p.165). If students are empowered in the learning process, they will become more actively involved, and develop a more personal investment in learning (Volt, 1999). Despite its importance, however, promoting empowerment in the learning process is particularly challenging for lower achieving students. Far too often they are “likely to experience a sense of alienation in the school environment and, therefore, find it difficult to identify with or develop ownership of what occurs there” (Gollnick & Chinn, 1990, p.29).

Nolet and Tindel (1994) maintained that special education programs too often tend to focus on interventions in the resource room that are aimed at helping the students ‘pass the test’ in the content classes. The intervention usually involves the special education teacher consulting the textbook, and the regular class teacher providing them a copy of the unit test. Parents of lower achieving students have to rely primarily on grading to decide how much their children are learning and, oftentimes, teachers report that their children are doing well. Nolet and Tindel questioned whether the results of these end-of-chapter tests is an indication of actual learning.

Through parental involvement within the grade nine language arts program, the writer proposes to develop a series of carefully chosen strategies, activities, and materials that will attempt to adapt curriculum objectives, behavioural and social as well as academic, to the individual learning styles that students possess. Hopefully, many of the recommended activities and ideas will help to create an environment that is more relevant to the individual student. The writer fully understands that the

effectiveness of the strategies and activities discussed in this paper may be restricted to the particular population of parents and students who participated in the project.

Expected Outcomes

The expected outcomes of this project can be divided into three main areas. Each of these is outlined below.

A. *The Writer's Expected Outcomes from a Professional and Personal Perspective*

Through this proposed project, the author hopes to achieve:

- Provision for a safe forum on discussions of sensitive issues;
- Thorough and comfortable experience with the teaching of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* software package, as well as related hardware;
- Knowledge in linking this play to other aspects of the language arts curriculum;
- The ability to present *Romeo and Juliet* in a more motivating and entertaining fashion, thus enabling the students to be engaged in active learning;
- Effective cooperative strategies between parent, child and school;
- Meaningful change that will allow for a more accommodating atmosphere to all dimensions of human diversity;
- Across the curriculum cooperation between the relevant subject and resource teachers;
- An improvement in leadership skills that will contribute to the author's abilities to promote future initiatives within the classroom;
- An application of theories studied throughout the Master's Program to practical settings;
- An increased personal awareness of the teaching practices of colleagues;
- A personal understanding of the issues involved with integrating students with learning difficulties into the regular classroom;

- A professional knowledge of effective in-service methods that will enable sharing of practical strategies with educators; and
- Determine any discrepancy between the intent of in-service training and what is actually achieved.

B. *Expected Outcomes from the Parents' Perspective of Home- School Collaboration*

In addition to the writer's personal and professional goals, the intent of the project is to promote greater parental awareness of how effective cooperation between the teacher and home can be beneficial to lower achieving students. Specifically, the goals from the parents' perspective for integrating a home-school partnership are:

- Realize that parent participation enhances the education of their own child;
- Support the school in determining the specific needs of their child in relation to his/her particular circumstances (Cunningham and Davis, p.1);
- Communicate to parents that they are relevant and are an extension of the services provided to educate their child (Cunningham and Davis, p.2), and that facilitators of this project do not consider parents as an auxiliary but a primary source of learning (Kellaghan et al., p.135);
- Appreciate that home-school cooperation involves the collaboration of all personnel who have a vested interest in the education of their child;
- Promote opportunities for teacher and parent in-service and continued support that addresses both technology skills and curriculum issues; and
- Encourage other parents to take responsibility for continued learning in parent-teacher cooperation.

C. *Expected Outcomes from the Students' Perspective*

Finally, the project will suggest activities that attempt to meet the following objectives and outcome goals for lower achieving students:

- Build self-confidence and self-esteem through reading, writing, speaking, debating, listening and learning activities;
- Critically examine and creatively use information;
- Personalize learning and become independent lifelong learners;
- Avail of the various group combinations that promote peer learning opportunities;
- Appreciate the value, as perceived by students, of Shakespeare's craft as a writer;
- Learn about the characters and plot of a timeless piece of work;
- Discover how the people and events compare to the students' own life and world;
- Compare the author's ideas and feelings about fate and love to that of their own;
- Experience seeing the text as a means towards a performance;
- Realize that the integration of parent-teacher involvement can be instrumental in addressing their future needs and concerns; and
- Appreciate that they are an integral part of the class.

Problems Addressed by the Project

The project intends to address two problems related to the utilization of parental involvement in the teaching of *Romeo and Juliet* - resource issues and the regular classroom teacher's background in teaching lower achieving students in a regular classroom setting. First, there are very few resources available to successfully implement the objectives of the course, whether for the regular or specialized students. *The English Language Arts: A Curriculum Guide* states that "literature offers students the opportunity to experience vicariously times, places, cultures, situations and values vastly different from that of their own" (1999, p.119). Though there are various suggestions throughout the guide for improving teaching and learning, there is no recommendation of appropriate and suitable activities for

teaching Shakespeare to lower achieving students.

Finding and developing usable activities is a very time-consuming process and only serves to burden an already overtaxed teacher. Parental involvement can be a valuable asset in lessening the apparent deficiencies that exist in meeting the needs of children with learning and/or adjustment problems. The goal of the project is to develop and implement flexible instructional approaches for *Romeo and Juliet* that allow the regular teacher to provide curriculum specific strategies and activities that conform to course objectives, and that can be tailored to each child's unique ways of learning. All suggestions for the *Romeo and Juliet* unit will have been tested in an actual class setting. To portray the 'flavour' of the suggested unit of work, representative samples of students' work will be provided, and wherever practical and feasible, the students' material will be reproduced as accurately as possible from its original language and format.

The project will also address concerns related to the practitioner who is working in a regular class environment that contains lower achieving students. Ferguson (1995) observed teachers treating included students as a separate entity and noted that, though they appeared to be doing social studies or math, it seemed as if they were going through the motions, rather than engaging in any real learning. Canning (1996) acknowledged that though the concerns of lower achieving students are being increasingly recognized, yet the needs of these students are often dependent on classroom teachers who generally are inadequately prepared to deal with these responsibilities. In the case of junior high teachers, Scales (1992) reported that nearly two-thirds of them described as inadequate their preparation for teaching diverse learners. Bond et al. (1989) maintained, however, that these students can be helped through proper diagnosis and remedial instruction. According to Cunningham & Davis (1995) a child who has special needs will require a variety of help and it is, therefore, fundamental for professionals to

share their skills with the parent.

Years of research have contributed to our knowledge of how to successfully include lower achieving students in general education classes. Nolet & Tindal (1994) believed that “the central question is not **whether** students who have mild disabilities should receive instruction in mainstream content classes, but **how** they should” (p.167). A growing number of educators are concerned, not so much with drilling these students in content knowledge, but rather that they use their learning to make a difference in their lives outside the classroom (Ferguson, 1995).

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Kellaghan et al. (1993) noted that there is extensive research to suggest that, "due to changes in society and in family structure and function, the effectiveness of many homes in providing conditions conducive to the educational development of children has declined in recent years" (p.146). The concern of these authors that the number of these "at risk students" is predicted to increase, must be seen as a very alarming message to all who have a vested interest in the education of children.

According to Nuckolls (1992) children tend to model and value what they experience in their homes, but even well-educated parents may not know how to foster their children's emerging competencies. When parents are low skilled, they provide limited opportunities to develop literacy and limited assistance with schoolwork at home. Therefore, there needs to be more contact between parents and school than that afforded by the parental interview, and that need is even greater for parents of lower achieving students. There are a number of possible reasons why parents are not cooperating more often with the school in the education of their children including (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1990, p.272):

- satisfaction with parental interviews and their level of participation causes them to feel no need to contribute more;
- knowledge about their child's handicaps and of the decisions made during the interview is not enough to allow them to participate;
- school personnel expect parents to play a passive role in the process.

Turnbull & Turnbull (1990) noted that when home-school collaboration was considered, discrepancies were found between the barriers identified by low income parents and those specified by special education teachers. According to low income parents, barriers to parental participation were

caused by logistical and communication problems; lack of understanding of the school system; feelings of inferiority; uncertainty about the child's disability; and concern about how they and the school can help. Special education teachers, however, cited parent apathy; parent lack of time, energy, understanding; and the devaluation of parent input by school officials as the main reasons why the home does not cooperate more often with the school. Davies (1991) suggested that we will overcome these barriers to effective home-school cooperation by defining parental involvement and identifying the types of meaningful collaboration. Only then can we succeed in and increase the quality of home participation.

Turnbull & Turnbull (1986) cautioned us that we should not focus on a student as one member of a family, but rather see the inter-relatedness of all members of a family. They stress that "educators should perceive each family as having its own critical balance, its peculiar center of gravity, in order to maintain if any professional intervention is to be beneficial to any family member or to the entire family" (p. v). They suggested that professionals must realize the potential impact, whether positive or negative, they can have in enhancing or hindering the family's ability to meet certain functions and that for parental involvement to be most effective:

Every family requires an individualized approach. Families have diverse resources arising from different exceptionalities, family sizes...and individual characteristics such as health, intellectual capacity, and coping skills. The multitude of possible combinations and permutations of all these factors create infinite variations that make each family literally as unique as a snowflake or a fingerprint...if students benefit from individualized instruction why not also individualize approaches to their families? Doing so requires an appreciation of the unique situation of each family. (p.45)

Cramer & Castle (1994) stated that ample evidence is available to demonstrate that parents in general are interested in the success of their child in school. Epstein (1995) maintained that when

parents get involved in education, children try harder and achieve more at school. There appears to be a consensus among researchers and educators that, when parents help and encourage their children to learn at home and help develop positive attitudes toward school, they are thus contributing to the personal growth and academic success of their children (Hawley and Rosenholtz, 1983; Fullan, 1985; Chavkin, 1993; Henderson & Berla, 1994). Swap (1993) noted that parental involvement does not always have to be comprehensive to contribute to the achievement of individual students. A survey of 7,836 students and their parents and teachers indicated a positive correlation between parental attendance at school events and higher school grades (Dornbusch & Ritter, 1988). The finding held regardless of the parents' level of education and/or social class. Swap (1993) also suggested that collaboration between home and school can even be beneficial to adults in that they reported increased feelings of satisfaction as contributing to important changes in their children.

Historically, according to Butera (1998), family intervention has typically focused on specific developmental needs of children with learning difficulties, the parents being largely relegated to the role of "passive clients" waiting to receive services. Recently, however, a major shift in the role of the family has occurred. Educators now support active family involvement in both the decision making and the implementation of the intervention process. Family priorities and strengths are considered just as important as family needs in providing support and guidance for a child with learning difficulties (Darling & Baxter, 1996).

Not all researchers, however, agree with the importance of family involvement in improving the education of lower achieving students (Poikkeus, et al., 1999). It has been suggested that interactional or family environment factors may actually foster the "the manifestation and the maintenance of learning disabilities" (Green, 1989, 1990, 1995; as cited by Poikkeus, et al., 1999, p.22). Some parental

behaviors, for example, such as excessive directiveness combined with low interactional sensitivity could possibly serve to hinder language development (Akhtar, Dunham & Dunham, 1991).

Rutherford and Billig (1995) advised that, though there is a wealth of research on the influence of parental involvement in early childhood education, very little has been done on its effect in the middle grades. To compound the problem, although parental involvement appears to be especially important to students during the middle years, these early adolescent years are quite often turbulent and difficult for young people and they do not appear to want to have their parents around. Teachers of junior high special education students may, however, have an advantage over their elementary and high school counterparts. It is suggested that, as with students who are lower achievers, there really is no typical young adolescent and because middle school students are diverse by nature, it is at this level that the inclusion process can be most successful. This is especially true when educators view the disabilities as an extension of student diversity rather than a departure from normality.

Summary

Though some educators have suggested that a home-school partnership may actually foster the continuance of learning disabilities, this chapter has focused largely on research which generally demonstrated that when parents become involved in their child's education, it enhances the student's self-confidence, strengthens interest in schoolwork, develops positive attitudes towards school, and raises the level of achievement. Unfortunately, however, parental involvement is often a matter of 'training' parents in the ways of the school, and assuming that there is a deficit in the home that somehow must be remediated.

The effectiveness of a particular implementation of home and school partnership will be

dependent on how responsive and able the writer is to adapting the teaching strategies into the learning environment. Just as significant will be a long-term commitment, mutual respect, widespread involvement, and a sharing of planning and decision-making responsibilities on the part of all-concerned. The strength of the collaboration may also be influenced by the students who must be made aware of their own responsibilities when working as a partner in this joint venture. Parents and their children appear to be quite willing to get involved with the school providing the involvement is meaningful, consistent with family priorities, and likely to be useful.

CHAPTER THREE

ROMEO AND JULIET UNIT OF WORK

The main impetus behind the project's unit of work is based on the beliefs of Brophy (1998) and Condry (1978). Brophy stated that too often the focus on students' work is what must be done to complete the activities rather than on the knowledge or skills that these activities were designed to develop in the first place. Condry argued that there has been a steady and unswerving increase in "abstract learning and a steady decrease in the learning of specific skills in a context where they are meaningful" (p. 185). Both writers agreed that students who are disengaged from their own learning processes are not likely to perform well in school, and that a teacher can make curricular and instructional adjustments that will increase the frequency at which students experience intrinsic motivation.

Applebee (1993) noted that lower achieving students spend relatively little time with literature, and an excessive amount of time with skill worksheets. The literature that is read by these students tends to be young adult fiction that is simply written and easily understood (Oakes, 1985). Adams (1995) disagreed with the assumption that poor readers are necessarily poor thinkers, and that they might be interested in the themes of love and tragedy presented in *Romeo and Juliet*. She advocated the exposure of challenging literature so as to strengthen the critical thinking skills.

In cooperation with the project's parents and the pertinent educational personnel, an attempt was made to identify the nature of each child's needs and the extent to which accommodations and supports would be necessary for each child to be successful. Instructional arrangements, curriculum content, and instructional procedures were often modified to coincide with the intensity of each child's learning

needs. The writer assumed that these accommodations would increase the likelihood that the project's lower achievers could be successfully included in the regular classroom activities.

Caring as a Strategy

Noblit, Rogers, & McCadden (1995) maintained that caring fosters teacher/student connections and encourages possibilities for learning that may not otherwise occur. In teaching children, however, they observed that control appeared to be the primary means for achieving goals and this need for control manifested itself as:

- Teacher's use of a fixed curriculum that makes no allowance for individual differences or situational modification;
- A competitive approach that sets students against each other and forces them into negative forms of social comparison;
- Disciplinary actions that stop bad behaviour but do not assist students' academic or social development; and
- Class size, scheduling, and administrative duties that prevent teachers from bonding with the students and other teachers.

Noblit et al. (1995) noted that learning can occur in the absence of caring, but without the presence of a caring teacher the possibilities are greatly diminished. They suggested that:

The focal point around which teaching should be organized is not the instrumental but the relational. Without this connection, a teacher may have the subject-matter knowledge and the technical ability to teach, but the opportunities for real learning will be scarce, because what the teacher does not have is the student. *Caring fosters this student/teacher connection and encourages possibilities for learning that may not otherwise occur* [emphasis added]. We cannot be certain about what precisely will be learned when teachers and students establish caring relationships. Caring creates possibilities for learning and development to occur but does not guarantee that children will learn specific skills or concepts. (p.683)

Epstein (1995) stated that school, family, and community partnerships will not, in and of themselves,

guarantee successful students. However, if the partnership communicates to the children that they are cared for and are encouraged to work hard in the role of a student, they will more likely do their best to learn to read, write, calculate, and learn other skills. She advised educators to make more *family-like* schools that recognize the individuality of each child and make each child cared for and included.

Dodd (1996) claimed that knowing students is as important as knowing the subject, and that teachers must create a classroom environment in which every student believes, "I count, I care, and I can". Understanding students' perspectives is the best way to foster engagement and learning, but unless teachers develop a trusting relationship with students, they will not likely succeed in motivating them. Effective teachers know that, although students may express ideas differently, to become engaged adolescents they "must have feelings of **ownership** - of the class or the task - and **personal power** - a belief that what they do will make a difference" (p.65).

It has been advocated that teachers use what is known and familiar as a point of departure for further enquiry, and that the students' areas of interest, background experiences, and their prior knowledge must be considered in order to provide appropriate instruction (McDiamond, 1991; Franklin, 1992; Obiakor, 1994). To understand the students' world perspective requires teachers to gather information about their students, thus becoming a 'student of your students' (Volz & Damiano-Lanz, 1993). Throughout the project, the writer attempted to gain greater insight into students by implementing the four approaches of Volz (1999):

- Talk to the student about his or her hopes, dreams, or wishes;
- Attend to the students' interactions with peers;
- Observe community activities in non-school contexts in which the student participates; and

- Discuss with parents their perceptions of what is important to their child, and indeed, what wishes the parents themselves have for their child.

Several educators have predicted that in the next decade one of the most important elements of the middle school curriculum will be character education (Dotson & Dotson, 1997; Loehrer, 1998). Helms, Hunt, & Bedwell (1999) maintained that in order to provide motivational and relevant instruction, teachers should develop the character education component after assessing the values of the specific students in their school. Throughout this project an attempt was made to personalize the activities based on the character traits of the specific students involved. Vito, Crichlow, and Johnson (1989) stated that “When students feel more connected to their schoolmates, teachers, and parents, and feel better about themselves, they will be more engaged in their learning than when they feel isolated or alienated from their social surroundings” (p.6).

Far too often, whether intentionally or unintentionally, those in authority attempt to lecture children to comply with an adult version of the world and this may result in resistance (Maag, 2000). Since all individuals bring with them a model of the world that is unique, adults must learn to join children in their frame of reference. In order to accomplish this, however, rapport must be established with each individual and this can only be accomplished when there is “a focus on providing individuals with genuine, unconditional positive regard, empathy, and honesty as a way to promote self-acceptance and self-responsibility” (Maag, 2000, p.137).

The Project's Activities

Whether they were verbal or in a written format, hereafter, all quotes will be reproduced as close to the original as is possible, including any errors in spelling, punctuation or grammar. In addition, in an attempt to protect the anonymity of the personnel and the targeted school and school district involved,

pseudonyms have been provided.

The writer completed the project within the boundaries of the local John Cabot School District environment. The beginning of the 1999-2000 school year saw the relocation of the site and office staff of the former school board to our John Cabot Junior High School. This setting allowed the writer to avail of the expertise offered by qualified personnel on the district's staff. With a population of 208 students, the school contains grades 7-9, with an age range of 11-15 years. Though the students are generally grouped heterogeneously, there are several resource students who need extra help to complete most tasks. To meet their individual needs these students have to do a modified program within the confines of the regular classroom or, when french and religion are being offered, attend resource classes.

The following table provides a general overview of the project's activities and strategies that generated from the *Romeo and Juliet* unit of work and were employed throughout the 1999-2000 school year:

Month and Year	Activity or Strategy
June, 1999	- Met with school and board personnel to identify project's students.
September, 1999	- Phone call and letter that informed parents of their importance to their child's education. - Parents filled out their child's profile.
October, 1999	- In consultation with their parents, students suggested how to make the play more enjoyable. - Lower achieving students and their parents viewed the movie <i>William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet</i> .
November, 1999	- After brainstorming with parents and peers, humorous skits were developed.
January, 2000	- <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> was used to improve social skills.
February, 2000	- Students and parents made a model of a character from the play.
March, 2000	- Parents cooperated in adapting the plot of <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> to the students' novel <i>Where the Lilies Bloom</i> .
April, 2000	- An 'action plan' activity was employed to build connections to the assigned reading materials.
May, 2000	- A 'choices' activity that demonstrated how lives are affected by the choices that we make.

June, 1999

In consultation with the speech language pathologist, the school's guidance councillor, as well as two educational psychologists, seven students were selected to participate in the project. A profile of each student, completed in June of 2000, can be found in **Appendix B**. It will be noted that though learning disabilities were suspected in certain students, it was not until lengthy testing that some students would eventually be diagnosed as 'learning disabled'. When the project was initiated, however, this information was not available and hence the rationale for originally identifying all the project's students as 'lower achieving'.

September, 1999

The original intent was to begin the project in September and provide three periods of *Romeo and Juliet* on a seven-day cycle, completing the project at or near the middle of December. Early in the school year, however, it became increasingly clear that this work load was proving to be excessive and was thus becoming counter-productive. According to Leithwood and Montgomery (1984) students would normally be more motivated to engage in behaviors which they believed would contribute to goal achievement. The writer required a more extended time-frame in order to determine the characteristics of the students involved, set relevant goals, and then attempt to adapt various strategies to their individual learning styles. Establishing, communicating, and maintaining cooperation around goals related to motivation and educational achievement involves careful and time-consuming preparation. So as not to overburden students with exhausting activities, it was decided to enrich the teaching of *Romeo and Juliet* by extending the delivery of the project over the course of the full school year and, thus, an attempt was made to generally cover one activity per month.

Swap (1993) maintained that building trust with parents is a crucial first step to involving the home and, as such, the writer's initial phone call to parents was followed by a letter informing them that the knowledge and skills that they possess are an invaluable asset towards improving the learning skills of their children. Above all, active participation for all concerned was the main goal and thus, the inclusion of parents as partners in any decision making was stressed.

After the first week of school, parents were asked to complete a family profile form (see **Appendix C**) that would hopefully inform the teacher as to their child's special interests and strengths, the parents' learning goals for the child, and any other information that the parent deemed pertinent. Due to the many different kinds of family structures of today, certain relevant information may be overlooked if the proper questions are not included. Family members may not have the same last names, or the child's primary caretaker may not be a parent. Lacking this vital information could eventually lead to embarrassing or awkward situations, and possibly interfere with a trusting relationship that must exist for two-way communication to be effective.

At varying stages of the project, to ensure that due consideration was given to the parents' involvement, a self-evaluation grid was completed (Cunningham and Davis, 1985, pp.20-22). Whatever model a given professional adopts, it is important to know the kinds of assumptions that are being made. To help uncover such assumptions, a grid of squares (Figure 1) with 10 columns and 18 rows was designed with the names of the project's lower achieving students at the top of each column. Each row of the grid will be used to answer specific questions about each of the children and their families. The 18 questions are as follows:

1. Have I met the family?
2. Do I consider the child in the context of his/her family?
3. Do I have regular, two-way communication with the family?
4. Do I respect and value the child as a person?
5. Do I respect and value the family?
6. Do I feel the family has strengths to help the child?
7. Have I identified the parents' abilities and resources?
8. Do I always act as honestly as possible?
9. Do I give them choices about what to do?
10. Do I listen to them?
11. Have I identified their aims?
12. Do I negotiate with them?
13. Do I adjust according to the joint conclusions?
14. Do I assume they have some responsibility for what I do for their child?
15. Do I assume I have to earn their respect?
16. Do I make the assumption that we might disagree about what is important?
17. Do I believe they can change?
18. Have I tried to identify the parents' perceptions of their child?

The rows were numbered from 1 - 18 to represent each of the questions. Beginning with row one, all questions was answered for each of the children. The number '1' was put in the appropriate box if the answer was 'Yes' or a '0' if the answer was 'No', and continued for all of the questions. When completed, the grand total will be a rough indication of the extent the home is being considered. The varying totals of each column might be an indication that the writer has been behaving differently according to the family. A low total in a particular row may represent that this is an area of neglect. See Figure 1 on the proceeding page:

Figure 1: Professional Assumption Grid

	Frank	Mary	Tanya	Lorraine	Dennis	Jack	Michelle
1. Met family?							
2. Consider context?							
3. Two-way communication?							
4. Respect & value child?							
5. Respect & value family?							
6. Family strengths?							
7. Abilities & resources?							
8. Honesty?							
9. Provide choices?							
10. Listen to them?							
11. Identify aims?							
12. Negotiate?							
13. Adjust to conclusions?							
14. Responsibility?							
15. Earn respect?							
16. Disagree?							
17. Assume change?							
18. Parents' perceptions?							
TOTAL							

Turnbull & Turnbull (1990) noted that the number of people at parent-teacher conferences affects different people in different ways. Some parents are overwhelmed with the number of professionals, while others see the same number as a show of concern. The writer decided to meet parents one-on-one in a very informal meeting that would be less intimidating and more focused. The basic intent of the conference was to pool the strengths of all concerned and offer creative suggestions that would hopefully promote a more effective home and school cooperation. Sanacore (1996) argued

that in order to facilitate effective cooperation between the students' home and their literacy acquisition in school, parents need to learn new strategies for helping their children and gain new insights concerning literacy and learning. At the completion of this unit of work, all participants will be asked to complete a questionnaire aimed at evaluating all the conferences and consultations provided throughout the year (see **Appendix D**).

Each of the project's students belonged to a two-parent family and, except for two cases, the fathers initially appeared to be very uncomfortable with any involvement in school-related matters, and preferred that the mothers be the contact person. Although mothers usually take more responsibility for child-related tasks in the school (Cooksey & Fondell, 1996), in two-parent households children are more likely to do well academically, to participate in extracurricular activities, and to enjoy school and are less likely to have ever repeated a grade or to have been suspended or expelled if their fathers have high as opposed to low involvement in their schools (Nord, 1998). It was contended by Nord, Brimhall, & West (1997) that fathers' involvement has a distinct and independent influence on children's achievement, over and above that of the mothers' involvement. The writer decided to view in a positive light the usual low participation of fathers in two-parent families in that it offered the personnel involved in the project an opportunity to increase overall parental involvement.

Past experience has demonstrated to the writer that if *Romeo and Juliet* was to be a successful experience for students, successful strategies have to be implemented that will both provide relevant background information for the play and build interest at the same time. Pearson and Fielding (1991) discussed the significance of background knowledge to text comprehension. Students and parents have many relevant life experiences that, when shared, help them to better understand *Romeo and Juliet* (Haroutunian-Gordan, 1991). Researchers need tap into this knowledge and have parents and students

share what they know, thus increasing everyone's knowledge. These students will then have more of an opportunity to share their perception.

October 1-15, 1999

Since fourteen or fifteen year-old students do not generally react favorably to an oral reading of Shakespeare, the traditional teaching of the play would prove to be a very tedious activity. Therefore, in response to one of the students' suggestions "watch the 1996 movie, which is made to fit present day, so it may be more understandable", the writer considered it advisable to allow the lower achieving students to watch the movie at home with their parents. The movie will be shown to the rest of the class at a later date, but the project's students and their parents would be given a much needed head start.

The showing of the 1996 movie, *William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet*, directed by Baz Luhrmann, and starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Claire Danes proved to be an invaluable asset towards achieving the expected outcomes of the project. The movie fast-forwards the play four hundred years to create an inner-city gang culture, one not unlike those being played out on the nightly news of big cities, and even in the smaller towns of North America. The movie provided a solid basis for discussions between parents and their children, as well as spin-off discussions on the 1997 film *The Titanic*, directed by James Cameron and starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet.

Nuckolls (1991) realized that the best way to get a student involved in literacy is to get the parents involved in their own literacy. He noted that if the parents are low skilled, they will provide a limited model for literacy and limited assistance with any schoolwork at home. Allowing parents to view *William Shakespeare's Romeo & Juliet* will graphically provide them with necessary background information and allow them to be on a more level playing field with their children. Lorenz (1998)

contended that “if you teach Shakespeare of any kind and you don’t use this movie, you ought to be sued for malpractice” (p.51). She elaborated on the importance of viewing the film:

The reason I loved the new version of *Romeo & Juliet* so much was because of its fervor. I felt the rage, grief, and passion of those pathetic Capulets and Montagues...I finally understood the importance and the tragic weight of the violent way of life they led. You don’t comprehend the love between Romeo and Juliet until you feel the bloody existence they lived. The frantic pace of the movie reveals the out-of-control, impulsive, hot-headed nature of these citizens of Verona. (p.50)

October 18-30, 1999

Recent articles discussed the positive correlation between learner-centered classrooms and students’ motivation to learn (Oldfather, 1995; Ames, 1992; Boggiano et al., 1992; McCombs & Pope, 1994). They noted that one reason for lower motivation in the junior high is the dominance of teacher-centered approaches that result in fewer opportunities for students’ self-expression, and that all students under the right conditions possess a natural desire to learn, even lower achieving students. Oldfather (1995) claimed that we should enhance students’ ownership of learning activities and try to create communities of learners among teachers and students by adapting more learner-centered approaches that encourage students’ self-expression.

Young et al. (1997) maintained that “teachers cannot instill motivation within their students, but they can establish classroom environments that enhance students’ desire to learn” (p.349). Environments in which learners assume more responsibility for making decisions about learning activities tend to increase learner motivation, and thus, groups of students were asked how they would make *Romeo and Juliet* a more enjoyable learning experience for classmates who have difficulty reading the play. Prior to initiating this classroom activity, the writer had already arranged for the seven

lower achieving students and their parents to discuss the topic at home.

Effectiveness of activity

Though two of the project's students put little effort into the classroom group activity, the writer was very satisfied at how effectively on-task the others were. Though Mary was the only lower achieving student who agreed to present the group's ideas in front of the class, it was encouraging to see the others participate in the discussions. Mary informed me that in discussions with her parents prior to the activity, one of her goals was, "to get up in front of the class and to get different ideas from my peers". When the activity was completed, she was asked what she thought of her group's effort:

It was cool. We got a chance to tell our feelings. About how we felt without teachers telling us something is easy or hard. I really liked the idea of giving a survey. It was cool. I like to go around and interfere (she meant 'interview') with other people, to find what other people are saying.

At the conclusion of the 'brainstorming for ideas' activity, Mary was asked to discuss whether her goals have changed, and what she would like to do with the suggestions made by her parents and classmates:

I want a good mark. I want to learn more about other people's ideas. I want to do some of the stuff, but I know we can't do everything. We need to do other stuff since we need to do other things to prepare for high school. April, my friend in high school, said that *Romeo and Juliet* is 'babyish' but I'm glad we're doing it. They do a lot of writing up there, but we get to see movies like *Romeo and Juliet*.

Though it is sometimes difficult to discern what she actually meant, Mary did realize that there is more to school than just marks. Wanting to speak in front of the class, to listen to the ideas of her peers, and to apply what has been learned are very commendable goals. Goodlad (1984) and Stodolsky

(1988) contended that teachers are attempting to cover too much content, resulting in students memorizing, but not reflecting and discussing. Students spend far too much time reading, filling out worksheets, and taking memory tests but not enough time engaged in reflection and then applying these ideas to authentic activities.

Mary was so interested in her group's survey idea that she decided to conduct one on her own. After being advised to seek her parents' participation, she submitted the following effort (reproduced in its original format):

Romeo and Juliet: Grade nine survey

Please answer the following questions below on Romeo and Juliet:

- 1) Did you enjoy the movie Romeo and Juliet?
- 2) Overall what were you favorite scenes in the movie or the Romeo and Juliet book?
- 3) What was one of the hardest words in the movie or book Romeo and Juliet?
- 4) Do you think the movie was suitable for our grade?
- 5) If Romeo and Juliet lived rather than died, would you enjoy the movie more?
- 6) What was your favorite character in the movie?
- 7) If you could change one thing in the movie what would it be?
- 8) If you said yes to number ten why would you change it?
- 9) Why would you like the Shakespeare or Newfoundland versions better?
- 10) What feelings did you gather from the movie Romeo and Juliet?
- 11) Can you relate to the movie Romeo and Juliet?
- 12) How would you feel if you were Romeo or Juliet?
- 13) If a tragedy like this occurred in your own town, how would you react?
- 14) Why do you think Romeo and Juliet kill themselves at the end of the movie?
- 15) Do you think Romeo and Juliet is a true story?
- 16) Do you think Romeo And Juliet is true tragic heroes or victims of fate?

Mary's enthusiasm for her activity supports Volz's (1999) claim that, when self-determination is not threatened, a child can find learning to be a pleasant, exciting endeavor. He contended that even though they sometimes learn slowly, they feel pleasure that their efforts are yielding results and find that they have extended their intellectual powers. Thus, their self-determination and enthusiasm are

maintained or improved.

Tanya was another student who demonstrated an improvement in enthusiasm when the experience was non-threatening. When assigned to a group activity, her self-confidence was so low that she made no effort at all to participate in ongoing discussions. Her antagonistic attitude further served to alienate her from the rest of her classmates. Tanya's severe attendance problem resulted in her submitting very few assignments throughout the school year, so with her mother's cooperation, her effort below (maintained in its original format) was a major accomplishment:

Questions for Romeo and Juliet

- 1.) *Why did Romeo and Juliet get call the star cross lovers???*
- 2.) *Why did Romeo kill his self when he found that Juliet was dead??*
- 3.) *Why did Romeo got kick out off his town just because that he kill a Mouature????*
- 4.) *Why did the writter make the book like the way that it is????*
- 5.) *How long did it take to make sure that Loe to lean ever word in the play Romeo in Romeo and Juliet ?*
- 6.) *How come the parents didn't like each other and wanted to kill each other????*
- 7.) *How old was the writer when he wrote Romeo and Juliet?????*
- 8.) *How come the writter wrote the story like he did?????*
- 9.) *Who come he didn't write it in our language?????*

Gollnick and Chinn (1990) appeared to be referring to students like Tanya when they noted that for certain learners, promoting empowerment in the learning process is particularly challenging. These students may develop a sense of alienation in the school environment and, therefore, find it difficult to identify with or develop ownership of what occurs there. By empowering students in the learning process, they develop a greater sense of connectedness, active involvement, and personal investment in learning.

November, 1999

Following one of the suggestions of the students, the writer decided to allow groups of students to develop humorous skits based on a particular incident from *Romeo and Juliet*. Deci (1992) and Reeve (1996) suggested that goals will be more successfully implemented if they are realistic and are given before the students have gained experience with the task. Therefore, the goals and instructions were discussed with the lower achieving students and their parents prior to introducing the activity to the rest of the class. The writer explained to both parties that the activity will hopefully improve discussion skills, as well as demonstrate that the student is capable of making a valuable contribution to group work.

The project's students were encouraged to brainstorm with their parents about writing a skit, and the following day they were grouped with their classmates. All students were asked to go to the computer room, write a humorous skit, and later videotape and perform it on stage. The lower achieving students were expected to show the film to their parents and discuss with them as to whether the experience was rewarding or not.

Though no student indicated that they had collaborated with their parents on the activity, the actual writing of the skits in the computer room proved to be a very satisfying experience for the writer, in that the project's students appeared to have asked a greater number of questions than usual regarding the meaning of certain sentences. Adams (1995) suggested that too often teachers will resort to the transmission method, simply read material to the students and then explain the meaning to them. He maintained that "rather than passively receiving knowledge, students need to become actively engaged in making meaning" (p.425).

January, 2000

Through discussions with the parents and the readings of the students' records, the most significant finding was that in the school setting most of the project's children were shy and had very weak social skills. This may be an example of Sabornie's (1994) contention that lower achieving students have poor self-concepts related to their school functioning, but not necessarily to their global self-concept. In his study of junior high school students, Sabornie found that lower achieving adolescents expressed more loneliness, felt less integrated in the schools, and were victimized (e.g., physically assaulted, had their possessions removed) more often than were other students. Allsopp, Santos, & Linn (2000) maintained that for students to be successful in school, they must demonstrate social as well as academic competence, and that educators fail students when they do not teach them to understand and respond to social situations effectively.

The writer considers the teaching of social skills as equally important as academic teaching; in fact cultivated social skills will undoubtedly lead to improved scholastic training. The following specific teacher strategies for coping with shy or withdrawn students have been suggested by several researchers over the last two decades (Honig, 1987; McIntyre, 1989; Thompson & Rudolph, 1992; Brophy, 1995):

- use interest inventories to determine interests of shy students, then follow up by using these interests as bases for conversations or learning activities;
- display their (good) artwork or assignments for others to see in the classroom;
- assign them as a partner to, or promote their friendship with, a classmate who is popular and engages in frequent contact with peers;
- check with these students frequently if they are prone to daydreaming;

- help shy children to set social development goals and assist them by providing training in assertiveness, initiating interactions with peers, or other social skills;
- provide them with information needed to develop social insight (e.g., explaining that new students often have trouble making friends at first, or that teasing does not necessarily mean that peers do not like you), suggesting ways for them to initiate productive peer contacts or to respond more effectively to peer initiations;
- provide them with a designated role that will give them something to do and cause them to interact with others in social situations in which they might otherwise become shy and retreat to the fringes of the group;
- teach them social "door openers" for greeting others and speaking to them in person or on the telephone, especially assertive requests ("Can I play, too?");
- make time to talk with them each day, even if just for a few minutes, and listen carefully and respond specifically to what they tell you; and
- use bibliotherapy materials such as "The Shy Little Girl," a story by P. Krasilovsky about a sad and shy girl who becomes more outgoing.

One of the project's lower achieving students, Tanya, had displayed aggressive behavior and a combative attitude and was by far the student in most need of improving her social skills. Since she lacked a sensitivity to others, Tanya generally had difficulty interacting with her peers. She had a very poor perception of social situations, which ultimately lead to unacceptable behavior, which in turn impaired her learning. Using carefully selected situations from *Romeo and Juliet*, an individualized intervention plan was developed for Tanya to improve her social skills. The main focus of this approach was to use strategies that provide self-concept support, encouragement, and opportunities to develop confidence and comfort within the classroom.

The writer decided to follow the advice of Warger & Rutherford (1993) who stressed the importance of teachers, guidance councillor, and parents working together to provide a support network

when things do not go as planned. They offered a list of twenty-three social skills (Figure 2) that teachers found to be linked to success in school:

Figure 2: Pro-social Skills for School Success

1. Saying "please" and "thank you".
2. Dealing with fear appropriately.
3. Dealing with anger appropriately.
4. Rewarding oneself.
5. Asking questions.
6. Accepting consequences of behavior.
7. Successfully coping with conflict.
8. Accepting responsibility for behavior.
9. Listening.
10. Successfully dealing with losing.
11. Responding to failure.
12. Successfully dealing with mistakes.
13. Building a positive self-attitude.
14. Following directions.
15. Making friends.
16. Understanding others feelings.
17. Compromising with peers.
18. Coping with aggression from others.
19. Cooperating with peers.
20. Accepting not getting one's own way.
21. Seeking attention appropriately.
22. Waiting one's turn.
23. Accepting the answer "no".

Since Tanya's parents have never attended any of the parental interviews at our school, the writer decided to visit the home. With the parents' input, an anger management program was devised for Tanya (see the November entry of the reflective journal for a more detailed account). Some examples of instructional strategies used for students like Tanya, whose targeted social skill was dealing with anger appropriately, are offered in Figures 3 and 4 (Allsopp, Santos, & Linn, 2000, pp.145-146):

Figure 3: The *Wait* Strategy for Dealing with Anger Appropriately

1. Watch for the "trigger".
 - count to 10.
 - Use relaxation techniques.
2. Answer, "Why am I angry?"
3. Identify my options.
 - Ignore the other person.
 - Move away
 - Resolve the problem.
 - "I feel this way when you..."
 - Listen to the other person.
 - Talk to the teacher.
4. Try an appropriate option for dealing with my anger.

After certain selected classes were completed, Tanya was asked to respond to a self-monitoring sheet (Figure 4). A teacher or guidance councillor then discussed the comments on the sheet with her and provided feedback based upon the performance of the targeted social skill.

Figure 4: Self-monitoring Sheet for Dealing with Anger

What was the trigger?	Why was I angry?	Did I identify my options?	What option did I choose and was it successful?

Evaluation of anger management program

The result of the self-monitoring phase was that, early in the school year, Tanya needed less and less direct reinforcement from her teachers and eventually she spontaneously displayed a major

turnaround in attitude and behavior, in that confrontations with teachers and fellow students were rare. Even the parents noticed an improvement in her attitude at home. For whatever reason though, Tanya's inappropriate behavior returned after the Easter Holidays. She was not completing assignments for any teacher, including projects that the writer had adapted to her level of ability and interest. Her attendance deteriorated such that she was present only twenty per cent of the time, and was twice suspended from school for inappropriate behavior. Even though in most of her subjects she received resource help, she failed to meet the requirements for grade nine but was advanced to level I anyway.

It is tempting for a teacher to attribute Tanya's total change in behavior to her mother's working in Prince Edward Island from April 28 to June 28. There can be no doubt that it indeed was a factor, but after further reflection the writer may share some of the responsibility. On July 18, Tanya's mother was contacted and asked her if there was anything that the school could have done differently to help her daughter. She admitted that Tanya deserved most of the blame, but questioned what might have happened if the writer's first visit to the home had been followed by another, two or three weeks later. Mrs. Kearns noted that, "When you came to our home, she appreciated the fact that her teacher was interested in her". The mother's comment appears to support the writer's belief that failing to do a follow-up visit to the home was a missed opportunity, in that further communication in the home environment may have served to reinforce Tanya's appropriate behavior.

Abrams (1986) realized that students who receive special education frequently will have social and emotional problems that will be manifested in inappropriate or even maladaptive behavior. Mather and Rutherford (1996) argued that, if children are to perform successfully in school, they must demonstrate both social and academic competence and thus the training of social skills must be an essential component of the public school curriculum, especially for lower achieving students. Schools

are actually failing students if they do not assist them in learning how to respond effectively to their social environment (Gresham, 1986; Hiebert, Wong, & Hunter, 1982).

February, 2000

The child's encounter with the text may be brought to a new level of understanding if he follows the reading with some kind of expressive output - not comprehension questions or workbook exercises but something which calls upon the child to show he understands what was read like recasting some aspect of the story in art, or construction, or acting or retelling. (p.335)

— Marie Clay (1991)

There were certain strategies within the *Romeo and Juliet* unit of work that were purposely geared towards the strengths of lower achieving students, and a de-emphasis on their reading and writing weaknesses. Hopefully, the learning atmosphere created would be non-threatening, non-frustrating, and without failure. Another reason for teaching these types of strategies relates to the very nature of special education itself. Many times special education, in its effort to remediate the student's deficits, tends 'to individualize the student to death'. Because of the dynamics of individualized techniques, group interaction in the learning situations will most likely become secondary. This is unfortunate since many times the lower achieving students' greatest strength is their ability to gather information by listening, asking questions, and discussing. This is not to say that individualization does not have an important role in the overall strategy of educating these students, but it should not be the total program and must be balanced with both small and large group activities.

Educators too often overlook what can be learned from parents and do not realize that one such small group strategy is seeking parental involvement and availing of its strengths. The writer made it a point to communicate to the parents that they are, not only their child's first teacher, but the only

teacher that will remain with that child for a long period of time. They have interacted with their children, and are well aware of their learning styles, as well as their strengths and weaknesses. It was stressed that parents are a rich source of information that can greatly contribute to the learning success of their children in the classroom, at home, or indeed any environment.

The writer hoped to, not only initiate parental involvement, but to sustain it. It was founded on the premise that family involvement requires a commitment to open, continuous two-way communication. Most schools appear to be satisfied with one-way communication methods with parents, but the need for more two-way communication cannot be stressed enough. The writer deems it critically important to take the time to listen to what parents have to say. Dauber & Epstein (1993) emphasized that the attitudes and practices of teachers and principals make a difference in the amount of parental involvement and in the achievement of students.

After the lower achieving students were made aware of their next activity, the following correspondence, adapted from Lueder (1989) and Combs (1997), was sent home to the parents:

Dear Parents,

We are very anxious to take advantage of your very considerable talents, abilities, and interests in order to increase the richness of your child's program. As a result, the language arts program will be initiating projects like the following that, with parents' cooperation, will serve to broaden our instructional resources. We fully realize that you are busy people, but many of you have already indicated your eagerness to contribute your time and talents to your child's education.

Allan Norman

Taken from Roy's (Ed.) 1987 edition of *Romeo and Juliet*, the following activity was included with the above letter:

Romeo and Juliet Model

Directions:

In cooperation with your parent(s), make a model of a character from *Romeo and Juliet*. Write a one-half to one page description of your character (tell who it is and its importance in the play). Your model must portray the character through the use of appropriate costume, props, or other attributes.

- 25% The model recreates the time period and portrays the character through the use of attire, props, and other attributes.
- 10% Artistic quality will be considered.
- 15% The model shows evidence of effort.
- 50% A one to two page written description of the character needs to be included.

Following is the direct response from the only parent of a lower achieving student who aided in the activity:

It was a worthwhile activity but at the beginning she was very stubborn and wanted to do it herself. I explained to her that there are times when she has got to let people help her. I did a lot of rowing with her but she kept on saying, Ah Mom, I'll do it myself! It's my project!. Eventually I just left her alone. She tried different ways to make the Juliet model. She struggled with a bean bag, and an old sock. Then she tried a piece of wood. One and a half weeks after you gave her the project, she finally came to me and said, "Ah, Mom, I need help!" This was the first time in a long time that she asked for my help in her schoolwork. I then showed her how to make a doll out of a pop bottle and an old Barbie doll. Her and I are going to make the dress tonight.

Mary wrote the following comment after having completed the model project with her grandfather:

I didn't spend alot of time with him because he's not my real grandfather and I love to do this with my real grandfather but he's gone to heaven. This is the first time I ever got to do something with him by ourself! Because I didn't feel comfortable before. When me and my grandfather was down the basement my grandmother come down to see what we were doing she was amazed that we were doing some thing together and most of all getting along. By joking and talking.

Ferguson (1995) discussed how grandparents are more of an asset today because they have more free time than before. This is particularly true in our local area where so many fathers are working on the Marine Atlantic ferry boats, and tend to be away from home for practically half the school year. Ferguson also noted that grandfathers in particular realize how they have neglected their own child and, now that they are retired they have more free time and, now that they are retired, they have more free time and, if given the proper training by the teachers, would be more than willing to contribute to the personal growth and academic success of their grandchildren.

Rothenberg (1996) advised teachers to remind themselves that school may be a much different place from those that grandparents remember. Therefore, schools might consider scheduling extra time for grandparent-teacher conferences; letting grandparents know how to reach the teacher not only when there is a problem but at any time; and encouraging grandparents to volunteer at school to gain a sense of current school practices. Whenever important notices are sent home, the teacher needs to be aware if it is indeed the grandparent who will be reading, signing, and returning the forms. It is imperative that the child and his or her classmates hear the teacher's acknowledgment of this important relationship.

March, 2000

The writer emphasized to parents that "The goal of instruction is not simply to learn a strategy but to acquire the targeted information taught in the general classroom through the appropriate use of specific strategies" (Katims and Harris, 1997, p.117). Instruction in strategies should be viewed as a vehicle for enabling lower achieving students to better acquire, store, and express the information required.

Realizing that background knowledge plays a significant role in text comprehension (Pearson & Fielding, 1991), the writer decided to increase the students' understanding of *Romeo and Juliet* by paralleling a sub-plot in the already-completed novel, *Where the Lilies Bloom*. Cullinan and Galda (1998) maintained that through aesthetic reading of literature, students are provided with opportunities to make decisions about the characters' choices in the story, and think about how this story affects their own personal value. In an attempt to allow students to reflect on their relationship with their parents, the seven students in the project were asked to cooperate with them on the following activity (taken from the site <http://www.teachersfirst.com/winners/romeo-survey.htm>). It was further hoped that this strategy would result in the sharing of information between parent and child that would in turn help build connections to the assigned reading materials. Students were asked to take home the following to share with their parents:

Perfect Mate: Student Form

In Act I Scene 2 of *Romeo and Juliet*, Lord Capulet, Juliet's father, and Paris who wants to marry Juliet, discuss the marriage. In many cultures marriages are arranged by parents with little or no input from the bride and groom. In this scene Capulet tells Paris:

*"My will to her consent is but a part.
And she agreed, within her scope of choice
Lies my consent and fair according voice."*

So, Lord Capulet at least is telling Juliet's suitor that she must also consent to the marriage. Of course, we found out that Juliet didn't want to marry Paris. She had fallen in love with the son of her father's bitter enemy, Lord Montague. In our novel, *Where the Lilies Bloom*, Devola wants to marry an older man against the wishes of her dying father and the appointed head of the household, Mary Call.

- Have you ever dated or even expressed an interest in a guy or girl that your parents disapproved of? If so, you should have some understanding for what Romeo and Juliet are going through in this play
- If you had to list the traits (physical, personality, etc.) of your perfect mate, what would they be? Try to be as specific as possible.

- Now, try to figure out what traits your parents would list if they were choosing the perfect mate for you. Again, try to be specific.

Student's Signature _____

REMEMBER! Do not let your parents see your list until they have completed theirs on the other side. Please complete both sides of this survey and bring it with you to our next class.

Perfect Mate: Parent Form

Dear Parent(s):

We are reading Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in English class and I would appreciate your taking the time to complete this survey. As you may or may not remember, the play centers around two young people who fall in love. Their parents, however, are enemies and make the relationship impossible for Romeo and Juliet. On the other side of this sheet I have asked your child to list traits s/he would want in a "perfect mate". Now, I'm going to ask you to do the same, without having looked at her/his list first. Naturally, you are welcome to read what s/he said after you have answered the questions. Confused? I hope not. If you are, please feel free to contact me at the school (999-0000) or at home (999-1111). Then again you could do what I do when I make an assignment that I don't understand: Ask your child what I meant.

Thanks for your help in completing this project.

- What traits (physical, personality, etc.) would you think your son or daughter would look for if searching for the perfect mate for himself or herself?
- Now, what traits would you consider most important if you were choosing the perfect mate for your son or daughter?

Parent's Signature: _____

April, 2000

Like the previous Perfect Mate activity, the *Romeo and Juliet* Action Plan below (adapted from Barrett, 1990) was given to develop the sharing of information between parent and child that, hopefully, would help build connections to the assigned reading materials.

***Romeo and Juliet* Action Plan**

Dear Parent(s):

In our last conversation we discussed in-depth the plot of *Romeo and Juliet*; addressed (student's name) next project; and decided upon the following goals that we hope to achieve. I devised an action plan chart (See Figure 5 for a sample) that will hopefully give your child a visual aid to complement his/her efforts.

Goals:

Student:

Parent(s):

Teacher:

Please read the questions below:

1. During the middle ages, girls from noble families were generally expected to marry young. A family was embarrassed if a daughter wasn't married by the time she was fifteen. Unmarried girls might be sent away to a convent to receive further training to be proper wives. Marriages were usually arranged by the families of young people. Most of the time, the engaged couple didn't complain about the arrangements. Sometimes betrothals, or engagements, were made when the children were as young as three. However, they weren't expected to marry until they were teenagers.

a.) Do you agree or disagree with both how young they were married and the idea of arranged marriages? Discuss this with your parents and include their response.

b.) Juliet went against her father's wishes and didn't marry Paris. If she had followed her father's advice, what do you think the outcome would have been? Do your parents agree or disagree with your opinion?

2. In the play there are several opinions about how Romeo and Juliet should solve their problems. The Nurse tells Juliet to forget Romeo and marry Paris. The Friar invents a risky plan that requires Juliet to be buried alive, and Juliet threatens to commit suicide if the Friar can't help her. In consultation with your parents, explain your reaction to each plan. Then tell what you think Romeo and Juliet should do to solve their problem.

a.) Reaction to her Nurse's plan:

b.) Reaction to the Friar's plan:

c.) Reaction to Juliet's plan:

d.) Your plan:

3. You may have questions for some of the characters. You may want to ask why they did something or why they didn't do something. Perhaps you would like to make a suggestion to a character. Or maybe you feel a character should be praised or scolded. This is your chance to talk to the characters.

- a.) Think of three characters to whom you would like to speak. Write their names in the appropriate space below.
- b.) Think of a question or a suggestion for each character you have listed. Write the question or suggestion in the space indicated.
- c.) Ask one of your parents to assume the role of each character you have chosen. Present your questions and ask them to respond the way *they* think the character would.

- i) Character:
Question or comment:
Response:
- ii) Character:
Question or comment:
Response:
- iii) Character:
Question or comment:
Response:

Figure 5: Sample Action Plan Chart (as completed by Jack and his father)

Date	Question #	Time Started	Time Finished	*Signature	Nightly Log
December 7	1	7:14	7:35	TS	very poor discussion
December 8	2	7:00	7:24	TS	better discussion tonight
December 9	3(a)	7:14	7:35	TS	understood question
December 13	3(b)	7:06	7:26	TS	things went well
December 14	3(c)	7:13	7:31	JS	knew the question

* TS - Father's signature; JS - Son's signature

May, 2000

When learners work in pairs or in teams, they find that they need skills to plan, organize, negotiate, make their points, and arrive at a consensus about issues such as what tasks to perform, who will be responsible for each task, and how information will be researched and presented. Stein (1995) identified these skills as being important for learners to living successful lives and by employers as necessary in a high-performance workplace (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991).

Because of the collaborative nature of project work, development of these skills will occur even among learners at low levels of language proficiency (Moss, 1998). The following activity was based on Lawrence's (1997) belief that within the group work integral to projects, individuals' strengths and preferred ways of learning nurture the work of the team as a whole.

Choices' Activity

Challenge: To have students discover that people's lives are dependent on the choices they make and that there are various options open to them. They will realize that making informed choices will positively affect the health, safety and well being of themselves and others?

Students will:

- work with parents to share their personal responses to the television movie *In the Name of the People* (2000) directed by Peter Levin and starring Amy Madigan, Richard Thomas, Scott Bakula, Kimberley Warnat, and Robin Ann Phipps;
- practice effective communication skills;
- examine their own and others' ideas in discussion to extend their understanding; and
- ask questions calling for elaboration, clarification, and respond thoughtfully and appropriately to questions.

Procedure: With your parents' cooperation, read the prologue from page 13 of our play *Romeo and Juliet*, and complete the form below (Figure 6). The significance of this vocab exercise will become apparent later in this activity.

Figure 6: How Has Your Thinking Changed

Words	Did you already know this word?	Do you know something about the word now?	Does the word fit under more than one category?	Did you make a connection?	Which words helped you make the connection better?
grudge (line 3)					
ancient (line 3)					
fatal (line 5)					
foes (line 5)					
misadventure (line 7)					
piteous (line 7)					
strife (line 8)					
fearful (line 9)					
rage (line 10)					
patient (line 13)					
toil (line 14)					

Harmon and Staton, 1999, p.32

Our discussions on the 'choices' theme have come from the following curriculum resources:

- the poem "Don't Quit"
- from our text *Exits and Entrances*
 - "Miniver Cheevy"
 - "Lucinda Matlock"
- Our novel *Where the Lilies Bloom*
- the play *Romeo and Juliet*

Along with your parents, view the upcoming TV movie *In the Name of the People*. In the film Scott Bakula plays John Burke, a man on death row for the murder of a teenaged girl. As the father of a thirteen year old, he worries what will happen to his daughter after his execution. Richard Thomas and Amy Madigan play the parents of the murdered girl. Madigan is part of an activist group campaigning for the execution of Burke. Thomas later discovers that he has a bond with the child of his daughter's killer.

The lower achieving students were asked to take home the letter below to their parents:

Dear Parent(s),

Everyone possesses different intelligences. Nevertheless, all students will come into the classroom with different sets of developed intelligences. This means that your child will have his or her own unique set of intellectual strengths and weaknesses. These sets determine how easy (or difficult) it is your child to learn information when it is presented in a particular manner. This is commonly referred to as a learning style, and many learning styles can be found within one classroom. Therefore, it is impossible, as well as impractical, for a teacher to adapt every lesson to all of the learning styles found within the classroom.

With your assistance, however, we can show your child how to use his/her more developed intelligences to assist in the understanding of a subject. With this in mind, there are a variety of ways to respond to the reflective questions below. For example, if your child is musically inclined, making up a song could be one response. You and your child could role play, or even draw a cartoon to illustrate the learning that has taken place. These kinds of presentations not only excite students about learning, but it also allows a teacher to reinforce the same material in a variety of ways. By activating a wide assortment of intelligences, teaching in this manner can facilitate a deeper understanding of the subject material.

Now that you have watched the movie *In the Name of the People* please feel free to respond to the following in any media you and your child deem appropriate:

- 1) With what decisions (choices) in the movie do you agree or disagree?
- 2) Concerning John Burke's punishment, what would be your recommendation to the courts?
- 3) If you were related to Jenny, could you forgive the inmate?
- 4) Comment on any change in your thinking over the last week.
- 5) What similarities and/or differences do you see between the choices made by characters in *Romeo and Juliet* and those from *In the Name of the People*?
- 6) If John Burke could speak to Romeo and Juliet five minutes before he was put to death, what advice might he give?

In your answers above use and underline as many of the vocab words as you can from the "How Has Your Thinking Changed" activity found in Figure 6.

Every activity discussed thus far was given to all students within the two language arts classes, but the nature of some objectives in the project necessitated that certain activities be specifically geared towards the lower achieving students.

A *Romeo and Juliet* Web Page (<http://www.k12.nf.ca/stjamesjh/shakespeare/>)

The learning potential offered by the Web has caused educators to rethink the very nature of teaching, learning and schooling. Owston (1997) cautioned us, however, that no medium is likely to improve learning when it is only used to deliver instruction. The key to promoting real learning with the Web is how effectively it is used in the particular teaching and learning situation. Following the students' suggestion early in the school year, the writer allowed the students to construct a *Romeo and Juliet* web page that hopefully would become an effective tool for fostering the development of the children's learning skills.

The web page, constructed entirely by the students, contains a rewriting of the scenes in their own words enabling the parents and the students to better understand and appreciate the play. As well, the thought- question section contains mostly discussion topics for parent-child exchanges that were devised by all students, including the lower achievers. Unfortunately, the tremendous amount of work meant that the web page was not completed until the last week of the school year and, therefore, its full potential as a learning tool could not be realized. That is not to say that the students did not benefit from the activity since collaboration with their parents gave them an opportunity to develop their writing and discussion skills, which were encouraged through the composing of thought questions and the rewriting of the various scenes in the play.

In the future the writer intends to add to our web page relevant Shakespeare links and provide

activities that will encourage parents and students to explore the Web with the intention of achieving the following goals (Owston, 1997, p.31):

- weigh evidence;
- judge the authenticity of data;
- compare different viewpoints on issues;
- analyze and synthesize diverse sources; and
- construct their own opinion of the topic or issue at hand.

In this way teachers will be encouraging and involving the home in the development of the students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Adapting Activity to Circumstances

The teacher of writing has an obligation to develop specific skills throughout the year, therefore, behind each piece of writing should be a plan. Thomas (1983) stated that "Without such preplanning, students will not, other than by happenstance, develop the writing skills that make them competent writers...encouraging children to write requires carefully planned strategies. Motivation, well thought out in advance, pays off "(p.67). The writer's experiences with this project, however, afforded many opportunities where advantage could be taken of certain 'happenstance' situations. These activities were not as elaborate and lengthy as those previously presented in this paper but yet they still served to develop specific skills of some students. A fitting example was demonstrated by Dennis when he offered to do the plot of *Romeo and Juliet* using a cartoon format. To assist the reader in deciphering frames 1-10, his original sentences (retained in their original format) will follow the cartoon:



They first saw each other



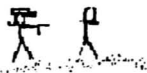
They got together



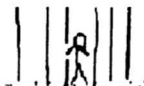
He is leaving and she is crying



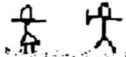
He kills somebody



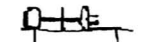
The police come and got it



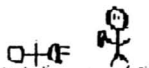
He is in jail



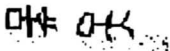
Some one brings her a**postion



She is Dead



Romeo see's her dead and kills himself



He is dead too

- 1/ They first saw each other.
- 2/ They got together.
- 3/ He is leaving and she is crying.
- 4/ He kills somebody.
- 5/ The police come and got* it.
- 6/ He is in jail.
- 7/ Some one brings her a**postion.
- 8/ She is dead.
- 9/ Romeo see's her dead and kills himself.
- 10/ He is dead too.

*him

**poison

Dennis's cartoon demonstrated an understanding of the plot, an understanding that he would have found difficult to express should he have been limited to a paragraph format. Swain (1978) discussed the cartoon's importance in helping such other areas as consonant blends, picture interpretation, possessives, special print, following directions, reading for details, summarization, detecting mood, predicting outcome, characterization, and alphabetical order. For the improvement of sensitivity to figurative language, students can be asked to find as many slang words as possible in their cartoon and define the words using context clues. For the development of critical reading skills, students can be asked to list all the different clues in the cartoon that indicate that the story is not realistic.

Anger Management

The conflict that was intensifying between Tanya and Lorraine provided another opportunity to avail of *Romeo and Juliet* to develop specific skills within the students. When the parents were informed as to the writer's intentions, both students were referred to the guidance councillor who developed a program for anger management. When the sessions were completed, the writer asked the two students to take home an anger monitoring chart (already mentioned in Figure 4), discuss it with their parents, and complete it when further confrontations occur between themselves.

Upon completion of the monitoring sheet, the students were asked to discuss with their parents the following questions from *Romeo and Juliet* (Roy, 1987, p.139). Since the focus of this activity was on developing social skills, not on writing ability, no written responses were required.

- What are some things that could cause a fight between two people your age?
- Describe a person you know who is always looking for a fight. What are his/her characteristics?
- Describe a person you know who never wants a fight under any circumstances. What are his/her characteristics?

- What conversation might occur between a person seeking a fight and a person wishing to avoid a fight? What argument finally decides whether they do or do not fight?
- How do you feel about fighting as a way of settling differences?

Effectiveness of activity

Whether the anger management training was totally responsible, the conflict did lessen in intensity but only for a two week period. A teacher must prioritize a tremendous work load, but the writer regrets not introducing follow-up activities to reinforce previous efforts, and also not arranging meetings with the families involved to cooperatively develop some type of action plan.

Parent-Student Reading Partnerships

According to Applebee (1973), when students have difficulty connecting their prior knowledge to texts, understanding becomes difficult and students' responses tend to focus on retelling content or giving simple evaluative statements. It has been reported that the use of literature about disabilities can be effective in promoting awareness, understanding, and acceptance of those with disabilities (Heim, 1994; Kelly, 1995; Andrews, 1998; Brown & Stevens, 1995). Monson and Shurtleff (1979) stated that "the children who had the greatest positive change in attitudes toward disabilities had either read books about disabilities or had books about disabilities read to them" (p. 421). To lessen the passivity these adolescents have towards reading, it is important for teachers to give them the opportunity to connect the literature they read to their own life experiences and the text (Aker, 1992), and interpret the actions and motivations of characters in light of their own experiences (Iser, 1978). It has been reported that poor readers experience difficulty in "making sense" of their reading and are thus in need of strategies to repair problems in meaning-making (Pearson, Roehler, Dole, & Duffy, 1992).

Towards the latter part of the school year, when it was confirmed that certain of the lower

achieving students had learning disabilities, the writer began a program to introduce these student and their parents, as well as some of their peers, to books about disabilities. The district educational psychologist and the librarian were asked to recommend particular books about disabilities that would likely motivate certain selected students (see Figure 7 for the criteria used to select novels on learning disabilities). One of the books selected was *The Freak the Mighty* by Rodman Philbrick about a large, awkward, learning-disabled boy named Maxwell Kane, whose father is in prison for murdering his mother, and a physically challenged, undersized Kevin who are both mocked by their peers. The boys quickly establish a close friendship. Using his intelligence, Kevin defends them against a group of bullies, while Max is his friend's legs, affording them both a chance to feel needed.

Figure 7: Criteria for Evaluating Novels that Feature Characters with Disabilities

The novels suggested in this article (Landrum, 1999, p.286) were evaluated according to the following criteria. The rating was holistic, rather than attaching a point value to each criteria. The holistic evaluation was used for two reasons. First, sometimes a criterion was met completely or partially, which make point values difficult to assign. Second, several of the novels were also read and reviewed by people with the disability illustrated in the novel of adolescent readers. Although these readers did not rate the novels, their opinions were taken into consideration.

Rating scale

- * Skip this book
- ** Good intentions, but not good enough
- *** Good book
- **** Great book

Plot

1. The events are realistic and reasonable, rather than unrealistic and contrived.
2. The disabled characters are active participants in the plot and its various conflicts; they initiate action, rather than exist outside of it.

3. The unfolding of the plot focuses on what the characters with disabilities *can* do rather than what they *cannot* do.
4. A superhero theme does not appear in the story.
5. For the most part, the same narrative could exist without a disabled character; it is not a didactic theme for a cause.
6. The disabled character faces conflicts similar to those of his or her peer group.
7. Although both the climax and the ending may include the disability of one of the characters, they do not focus on it.
8. A cure for the disability is not the solution to the disabled characters' problems or conflicts. Nor will a cure give them a normal life. Similarly, attitude will not prevent or create a cure.
9. Even though the book is fiction, all the data pertaining to the disability are accurate.

Character development

1. The disabled characters are portrayed as strong and independent, rather than passive, atypically naive, child-like, or dependent.
2. The disabled characters are competent individuals who speak for themselves.
3. The prominent traits of the characters with disabilities are what they *can* do, as opposed to what they *cannot* do.
4. The disabled characters portray a full range of emotions: anger, sadness, joy, love, pride, shame, and so forth.
5. The disabled characters' temperament is not dramatically different than that of the other characters. An extraordinary positive or negative temperament may imply that the disability was caused by attitude or vice versa.
6. The disabled characters may or may not be coming to terms with their sexuality, typical of readers of intermediate and adolescent fiction; however, they are not represented as asexual.
7. The disabled characters are not portrayed as outsiders or rejected by their peers because they are disabled; they have friends, families, etc.
8. The disabled characters are developed as multidimensional and rounded; they are not flat or stock characters.
9. The disabled characters are not portrayed artificially as heroes or victims.

Tone

1. The text does not use words such as *retarded*, *handicapped*, *lame*, *crippled*, or *special*.
2. The tone fits the theme, rather than being overly saccharine or simplistic.
3. Whenever emotionally or sexually charged scenes appear, they are critical to the plot and theme, not to manipulate the reader's emotions.
4. If the story is a tragedy or leaves a feeling of hopelessness, it is due to the human condition in general, not a character's disability.

Young et al. (1997) contended that all students under the proper conditions possess a natural propensity to learn, even those adolescents who are disenchanting. It was the writer's intention to initiate

a program where certain learning disabled students and their parents, as well as some of the students' peer groups, would read selected novels about learning disabilities. Then, through the use of selected activities (see Figure 8) promote awareness, understanding and acceptance towards those with disabilities.

A few classmates of those students with learning disabilities had the opportunity to read *The Freak the Mighty* and admitted to having more of an understanding as to what a learning disabled person experiences. Due to the short time remaining in the school year and the students' concentration on final exams, however, very little effort was realized from the learning disabled students and their parents. Though the writer is unable to say with certainty whether the reading partnership would have been an effective strategy, past experiences with these students and their parents suggested that the activity appeared to have the potential to be very successful.

Figure 8: Reading Partnership Agreement

Name: _____

Date: _____

We wish to fulfill the following agreement in regard to recreational reading: _____

We wish to fulfill this contract by

(Date)

(Student's Signature)

(Parent's Signature)

(Student)

I did, did not (circle one) fulfill this agreement because _____

(Parent)

I did, did not (circle one) fulfill this agreement because _____

(Student)

As a result of this partnership, I have learned _____

(Parent)

As a result of this partnership, I have learned _____

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT EXPERIENCES: A CRITICAL, REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

Teachers who are unreflective about their work uncritically accept this everyday reality in schools and concentrate their efforts on finding the most effective and efficient means to achieve ends and to solve problems that have largely been defined for them by others. These teachers lose sight of the fact that their everyday reality is only one of many possible alternatives. They tend to forget the purposes and ends toward which they are working.

– Gerald Taylor & Robert Runté (1995)

Throughout this paper all comments of students and parents are typeset in a common font, regardless of whether the original work was conversational, handwritten or typed, but every effort was made to keep it as close to the original as possible, including errors and format. The following journal is intended to be an informal, personal reflection of the development and implementation of the *Romeo and Juliet* unit of work. The sum total of parent-teacher-student contacts was far too great to include them all, but the events and activities below are representative of what transpired during the time of the project.

In discussions with other Masters of Education students, I now realize that I am not alone in the unsettled approach to the final stages of the program. My indecision was typical of most undertakings at MUN since the fall of 1997 when I began my Masters. Discussions and assignments from all courses presented quite a challenge in trying to balance the theory and practicality of the education profession. Though my last course was completed in April of 1999, it was not until the early part of March of the same year that I decided on doing a project.

The actual topic presented an even more formidable task. With only four years left in my teaching career I wanted to choose a topic that would be practical to me as the project was ongoing.

Throughout the Masters program, the topic that left the greatest impression was motivation and it was while reflecting on same that I began to become very interested in parental involvement in schools and the impact it could have on students' education.

March 15, 1999

Phil is an extremely pleasant student who, if you pass him five times in the corridor, will say 'good day' as many times. Even making allowances for any learning differences, it amazes me that a student who constantly demonstrates such a positive attitude towards school could be struggling so much academically. School records do not always give one a well-rounded picture of the individuality of a student so it might be advisable to meet with his parents to try and fill in some of the gaps.

March 16, 1999

Phil's mother had the following conversation with the writer about her home-school experiences:

The only time I dealt with the teachers was when it came to parental interviews. Once in grade two or three, the school said they were going to do evaluations (she probably meant 'testing') on him but they never ever got back to me. He used to get study guides when he started taking exams. They were helpful in telling what questions he would have on the test. Then in grade six they stopped giving it to him; this was only hurting him.

March 17, 1999

Though Phil was a grade eight student and was thus not selected to participate in the grade nine *Romeo and Juliet* unit of work, the conversations with his mother were instrumental in deciding upon the focus for this paper. The education system has failed when a parent equated a school's success with the giving of adequate study material to the child. More effective collaboration between the home and school is necessary to convey the message that many factors contribute to the effectiveness of individual instruction. The teacher must not only determine what should be learned, but help establish the specific environment, techniques, and strategies that will maximize each student's learning in both specialized and mainstreamed settings.

June 6, 1999

I realize that the winter course of 1999, Education 6647 *Diagnosis of Reading and Writing Difficulties*, prepared me well for the topic of parental involvement. The course's case study, however, was on one student whose parents were extremely interested and cooperative in whatever suggestions were made. The wide range of personalities of the seven students and their parents (some of whom the

writer had taught) that have been selected by the school personnel appears to have ensured that this project will be challenging. Hopefully, the experiences gained will not only provide the children with effective learning strategies, but will also help lessen the isolating experience that teaching has become.

October 15, 1999

I set up a meeting with Jack's father to discuss how to better motivate his son. He is an extremely introverted student, thus making it very difficult to carry on even the simplest of conversations with him. Yesterday he passed me an envelope from his mother with the three dollar registration fee for the Home and School Association. I have no idea what he said to me as he passed the money; it was totally undistinguishable. Jack's father told me that his son just does not enter into small talk, that he himself finds it very difficult to get him to open up and have a good conversation. It was very interesting, however, to find out that Jack loves hockey and enjoys doing outdoor chores. His father said that, if he could, his son would shovel snow from all the driveways in the neighborhood. Thanks to the interview, I now at least know more information about Jack, information that will allow for adapting certain activities to his strengths.

November 6, 1999

I asked the computer teacher to install the *Romeo and Juliet* CD Rom, but due to technical problems it could not be arranged. We then approached the district computer technician who attempted to correct the problem but again to no avail. A disappointment because I had already evaluated the audio and video components of the CD and had thoroughly enjoyed them. I had hoped that the experience would be a much preferred learning tool than any reading of the text. A disappointment but any educator must expect an occasional setback, and then devise a new strategy.

November 8, 1999

To say Tanya has an attendance problem is an understatement. Not only will she miss two or three days straight but when she is in school, she will show up for class ten to fifteen minutes late. Fairly often she will attend two or three morning classes and then go home saying that she is sick. To compound the problem, the principal informs me that in the three years that Tanya has been in our school, the mother has never attended a parental interview session. Tomorrow I will attempt to put to use some of the knowledge gained from all the readings I have done on parental involvement. If the parent does not come to school, I will go to the home and establish some contact with the parent.

November 9, 1999 (7:30-8:15 p.m.)

I have just attended one of the most constructive parental interviews of my career!! In the school parents have to wait outside the classroom to get a ten to fifteen minute conversation with the teacher. Far too often it is a situation whereby the teacher does the talking and the parent listens; rarely does the home life of the child get attention. It is almost as if the teacher considers the home as existing in a vacuum, playing a minor role in the child's education. Tonight's interaction with Tanya's parents

demonstrated just how critical it is to establish meaningful contact with the home.

When my car pulled up to Tanya's house, she was waiting for me on the bridge. I had already informed her in school that I would be giving only positive comments to her parents, so I suspected that explained her smile and pleasant disposition throughout my visit. The father was very reserved, made no eye contact, and spoke very little throughout the session. It was quite evident that the mother was the spokesperson for Tanya's education.

I kept my promise to Tanya and gave only positive comments about her behavior in school. I entered into a conversation with her on *Romeo and Juliet*, and both parents were surprised at her knowledge of the play. Why would they not be a little in awe? Their only contact with school was when an administrator or teacher phoned to complain about her absence. Not that there is anything wrong with the school relating its concern for her absenteeism, but school personnel must realize that this type of student occasionally deserves some positive feedback.

November 9, 1999 (9:00 p.m.)

Reflecting on it now, I see how we can sometimes take for granted certain minor occurrences. I now see the following as important outcomes from tonight's forty-five minute visitation:

- They could now put a face to a representative from their child's school.
- The parents found out that they have a school that cares about the education of their child.
- They were informed that her in-class behavior had improved tremendously from last year.
- A detailed account was given as to what Tanya's next assignment is and how the parents could offer help.
- Discovering that Tanya has a computer allows for the adapting of future assignments that more readily conform to her pattern of learning.

November 23, 1999

I met with Michelle's mother at school for parental interviews and informed her that I would appreciate working with her to help her daughter. I asked her to write up a few ideas on how we both can help Michelle and give me her responses when she has time. She then left my class as I had many more parents to see. In forty-five minutes she unexpectedly came back and gave me the following correspondence:

I will work with Michelle by:

- (1) talking, lecturing on her work
- (2) taking more time with her work
- (3) try to get her to talk more about the problem she having with her work
- (4) to encourages her more
- (5) to help her learn
- (6) help her build up her self-confidence

Mr. Norman you can work with Michelle by:

- (1) talking to her
- (2) asking her if she understands
- (3) by phoning her mother and father to let them know about her problems
- (4) to encourage her
- (5) giving her good praise
- (6) help build her self-confidence

November 23, 1999

Tanya was proud to tell me that her father was coming for parental interviews. It was the first visit by any of her parents since entering junior high three years ago. The father appeared to be unconcerned when I praised her for her improved attitude, and wanted only to discuss the fact that she had failed all but one subject and was so tardy with her assignments. I will attempt to give her assignments that are more geared to topics in which she has interest, meets her ability, and allows her the freedom to express herself in a format with which she is comfortable. The positive results from such an assignment should serve to complement and reinforce her appropriate behavior.

November 27, 1999

I contacted Jack's father regarding the contract I gave for reading the book *Voices in the Night*. He informed me that it is a struggle to get his son to read and that he just does not have the interest. Both parents are involved with reading to him or he reading to them. I informed the father of the Action Plan Project I had assigned to Tanya and her parents and he agreed to become involved with his son. I asked him if there was any problem with interpreting *Romeo and Juliet* to please give me a call. I assured him I am quite willing at any time to become a resource line for his son's project.

December 1, 1999

Michelle took home with a summary of *Romeo and Juliet*, as retold by Beverly Birch, to give to her parents. An enclosed note read:

Congratulations on your daughter. Those of us at John Cabot Junior High realize that your job as a parent is just as important and maybe more so than ours. You the parents, were her first teachers. Your comments on how the school can better help your daughter were very informative. Thank you for your prompt reply. Please read this article on *Romeo and Juliet*. Your understanding of this play will be very beneficial when you, your daughter, and I meet to discuss further activities on this topic.

December 2, 1999

I realize so much of this reflective journal has involved Tanya, but it seems that most of the positives of the project have revolved around her. She has now asked me twice to give her an assignment despite the fact that other teachers today have been complaining that they can't get her to

pass in any material. What upsets me the most is that I question whether I would have the same patience if I were not doing this project. In other words, it has demonstrated to me that there are answers if we care about the students, use the proper strategies, and have patience. Tanya's situation happens to be one of the worst case scenarios, so imagine the possibilities with so many other students!!!

December 6, 1999

Today, I was very disappointed in Tanya's behavior. An assignment that I had adapted to match her interest and ability is now one week overdue. She claimed that her computer was not working and gave her standard excuse that, "Mom is going to bring it up after dinner". Not only did her mother not show up, but Tanya skipped off again for the afternoon session. I cannot deny that I am very discouraged with this attitude. A teacher has only so much time to offer and eventually one must weigh the worth of channelling it in a direction where there is a likelihood of so little benefit. Though I am frustrated that she still is not completing her assignments and continues to be an attendance problem, I am reflecting on whether my time spent with Tanya and her parents is not producing some results. At least it is comforting to know that her social skills have definitely improved.

To discover other strategies that would improve the situation, I read Brophy's (1998) *Motivating Students to Learn* and realized that my mind-set needs adjustment. Whether I am being successful or not depends on the goals I am setting for Tanya, or indeed the goals she is setting for herself. Without really realizing it, the only goal Tanya and I are setting is that she pass in her assignment on time. I need to talk to her and her parents and have a further discussion on goals.

December 7, 1999

I decided to phone her parents and devise a strategy to get her to pass in her assignment on time. I just finished talking to both parents (Tanya was not home, having gone out of town for the weekend). I told her parents that she did not give me her assignment and had said her mother was going to pass it in dinnertime. Her mother was not aware of this and also not aware that she skipped school for the afternoon session. Tanya's mother did say that there was a problem with the computer but it has now been fixed. I again assured them the reason behind the phone call was not to complain, but to devise a plan for all of us to engage Tanya in real learning experiences.

I was extremely pleased to hear that Tanya had done more work than I realized on her assignment. Through parental involvement I have discovered that, though she was late passing in her paper, she still has done more work than we have given her credit. One must wonder if more home-school participation in the earlier years would have prevented the undisciplined Tanya we see today.

I told her parents that we need to set different goals for Tanya. Her only previous goal was long-term, that of passing in an assignment after a three-week period. With everyone's cooperation, I would draft an action plan for her next assignment that would spell out realistic, measurable, and attainable goals. This will now mean that all parties concerned will receive a sense of accomplishment on a daily basis, which will hopefully serve to strengthen motivation and develop a more effective partnership.

December 7, 1999

Mary asked and received permission to read the poem to the class "The Teddy Bear", a poem about a teenage girl who was beaten by her mother. She had overheard some adults discussing the poem, read it, and liked it. I asked if the *Romeo and Juliet* unit of work was a factor in her increase of presentations in front of the class. She said, "Yes, because when we presented our skit in *Romeo and Juliet*, a person in my group said I should read since I am not afraid to get in front of the class anymore." I must remember to tell her parents of her improvement in reading in front of the class, an area that often receives little positive feedback. Mary has demonstrated a learning style, one that I must ensure receives strengthening.

December 8, 1999

Tanya came today to say she can't work on her assignment because her grandfather passed away. After telling her I was sorry, I asked her how much work she had done up to that point. She said she had done none at all. Even though she was supposed to be following a set schedule, under the circumstances, how could I be upset? There are more important things in life than school. It is my responsibility as a teacher to let the parents and the child know that I care. I phoned Tanya's mother to express my sympathy for her father's death. Caring teachers will extend themselves beyond the job description and be supportive as circumstances change in the students' lives.

December 10, 1999

Today I met with Michelle and her mother in order to discuss strategies that both could use to improve their understanding of *Romeo and Juliet*. I was surprised at how Michelle's personality changed, being very rude to her mother. I explained to her that school is not only about books and that she needs to show more respect towards her mother. When her brother's name was mentioned, she began to cry. The mother explained how cruel her older son is to his sister. I then spent the better part of the session discussing the problem, and offering any of the school's services, and mentally noting that in the future Michelle needs experiences that will increase her self-confidence.

December 13, 1999

I met Michelle and her mother at the post office. She again wanted to remind me that if there was anything she could do to help her daughter she would. Also today she phoned to tell me Michelle said I was interested in the Columbine High School tragedy and there was a program on at 11:00 p.m. She can't tape it but she wanted me to know that the program was on. The last session with them appeared not to have made any inroads, only to have awakened negative experiences, but maybe they appreciated it more than I realized. What I saw as a disappointment was a normal day to them. They obviously enjoyed having a teacher take time to make them feel special.

February 1, 2000 (2:45-3:30 p.m.)

We had just completed an ISSP meeting with Frank and indicated his needs to his mother. One of the objectives I mentioned was that short term goals would be desirable in order to build on his self-esteem. I also stated that more home and school cooperation would be desirable. To both suggestions the mother and the teachers present were in total agreement.

Tonight I followed up the meeting with a phone call to ask for the mother's cooperation in the *Romeo and Juliet* model project where they make a model of any character from the play. They had to then write a one-half to one page description of the character (tell who it is and its importance in the play). The model must portray the character through the use of appropriate costume, props, or other attributes. She was pleased to be of any assistance. I then advised her what goals were expected from Frank and to ensure that he receive ample encouragement.

February 1, 2000

I phoned Michelle's mother on cooperating with her daughter on the *Romeo and Juliet* model project. The mother was very cooperative and made suggestions as to how she was going to help Michelle with the model (she mentioned using a toilet paper roll as the main body of the figurine).

February 16, 2000 (2:45-3:30 p.m.)

We had an ISSP meeting for Tanya and gave her mostly positive comments. It was the mother's first visitation in the three years that her daughter has attended our school. At the beginning of the discussions the mother was a little upset and insisted that she should not be held accountable for every time her daughter is absent. The rest of the session was extremely constructive. The mother appeared to appreciate the fact that this had not been the usual parental interview where blame was levelled at her daughter for poor attendance and incomplete assignments.

February 28, 2000

I just had a very interesting phone call with Mary's father! In a discussion about how the school could better cooperate with the home, he became a little upset that nothing was done for him back when he went to school. He said that when he was a student, teachers thought he was a trouble maker because he couldn't learn. He said the system didn't detect that he had a learning disability and, therefore, let him slip through the cracks. He stressed, however, that he would still come to school to try and help his daughter. Since I started communicating with the home, this has been the most responsive that he has been.

February 29, 2000

Though I had contacted all the project's parents, only three showed up for a briefing on how things have progressed thus far - Michelle's mother, Frank's mother, and Tanya's father. I again informed them how research has shown that cooperation between school and home can help their child.

I reiterated that *Romeo and Juliet* was being used as a learning tool to help motivate their kids, as well as providing them with effective learning strategies. The father appeared to be very uncomfortable and a little disinterested. The most rewarding part of the night came when Michelle's mother started giving advice to Frank's mother on trying different strategies with a child's learning when a particular one doesn't work. All three parents admitted that the cooperation between home and school appears to be working and needs to continue.

March 19, 2000

For the last three days, sometimes three times a day, Tanya continued to demand from me her next assignment, so today I gave her a new one. While walking home from school today, she shouted out to me that I didn't give her the instructions for her project. Though her behavior has deteriorated lately, the possibility does exist that she may be getting something from the home-school contact.

May 1, 2000

Tanya's father informed me that his wife had gone to Prince Edward Island for work and wouldn't be back for three months. There is no doubt that this will negatively affect Tanya's attendance as well as the home-school contact.

May 2, 2000

For the last month in particular Lorraine and Tanya have been getting into major arguments, one even culminating in a fist fight. After referring them to the guidance councillor, I met with Lorraine and her mother to teach some pro-social skills for school success and anger control management techniques. Both were very cooperative and agreed to work together to improve Lorraine's social skills.

May 3, 2000

Lorraine came to tell me that she attempted to follow the guidance given her on anger management. Today, when Tanya got upset with her, she just followed the advice and walked away. Lorraine appeared to be very proud of the control she displayed during the situation.

June 23, 2000

Since her mother went to P.E.I. on April 28, Tanya's attendance has fallen drastically and has attended only seven days out of a possible thirty-five. Though attempts have been made to enter into a partnership with the father, he has not filled the void left by the mother's absence. It makes one wonder just how much can be done for a student when you are not getting ample cooperation from the home and the child.

CHAPTER FIVE

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

The writer realizes that in the presentation of any new project one will obviously be confronted with many obstacles that will largely be due to inexperience, but the lessons learned will successfully contribute to the future delivery of such a unit of work. As no control group was used, the comments that follow are not the result of any scientific study, but they do represent the opinions and critical reflections of the educator.

Student Profile

All students were in grade nine and ranged in age from fourteen to fifteen. At the start of the *Romeo and Juliet* project certain students were suspected as having a learning disability, but this had not been confirmed by any professional diagnosis. In two cases it was suspected that the students' learning was negatively affected by the home environment, but again this was not confirmed.

The lack of information explaining why the students were lower achieving indicates that the school needs to work closer with the home to arrive at an earlier identification of the problem. This lack of knowledge may account for the lower positive results in the initial half of the program. But one positive outcome of the project was that the writer became more of an advocate in pressing the appropriate district personnel to determine the cause of the students' lower success with learning experiences.

Parental Involvement

An interesting observation from the parental involvement experience was the confirmation that, though parents may not outwardly appear concerned with the school, they are genuinely interested in contributing to the education of their children. When the project was initially conceived, the author realized that if parental participation were to impact student learning the involvement must be meaningful to all concerned. An attempt was made to convey to parents that improving education must be accomplished through student-centered strategies that enable them to become active rather than passive learners. For example, parents were encouraged to become involved in the reading of stories and novels to their child, mainly the individualized material that had been preselected by the librarian and adapted to the child's circumstances. The feedback that resulted from this strategy was usually positive, in that the parents became involved in an experience that promoted positive attitudes toward their child's learning situation. When asked if the cooperation between the home and school was beneficial one parent reported:

Yes, because the times we spent were very beneficial. It helped Michelle in many ways that I didn't know I could help. It helped in that I didn't think teachers cared enough. It showed me that teachers can be dedicated to their students. It also made me realize that there was more I could be involved with in helping my child. I saw a big change in Michelle in many ways. She took more confidence in her work such that, when she finished, she had done her best. It seemed like she took more pride. She didn't feel like she felt stupid anymore.

The writer's attempt to improve parental effectiveness by promoting parental group involvement was very productive. On one occasion, without any prompting from the writer, a parent began sharing successful strategies that had worked for her and her child. A father commented on his cooperation with another parent and child:

Yes, the home-school cooperation was somewhat helpful. For whatever reason, during the beginning activities of *Romeo and Juliet*, Jack seemed to be more enthused but later in the year he was bored with it all and it became too much of a task. I am still struggling to find out what kind of a learner he is, whether he is kinetic (his word for "kinesthetic") or... He just doesn't seem to be reading to understand. The activity he seemed to get the most out of was when I went with him over to another student's house and the two fathers and the two sons listened to the *Romeo and Juliet* CD. I was really surprised at how well he listened to the CD and the conversations he had with Henry and his father. There was a good two way conversation with Jack and Henry. When I talked to Jack afterwards, he seemed to be very impressed with the man's knowledge of the play. He was really pleased that he had put it in layman's terms. I was not surprised at how difficult the play was for him to read, but I was really surprised with his comprehension of the play.

One father's comment demonstrated that educators must encourage dialogue in order to break down the barriers that prevent, negate, or interfere with real learning engagement.

I hope you do more for my daughter than you did for me in school. No teachers really understood my problem except Mrs. W. She was the only one who understood my situation. All those years nobody cared about my condition, that I had a disability when it came to reading. In other words, I didn't see the words properly.

Although the project stressed that the goal of home-school cooperation involved more than the completion of homework, most parents still measured the success of any activity by their child's on-time completion of the appropriate responses and the obtaining of a satisfactory grade. This mind-set is obviously a conditioned response and the writer needs to more effectively communicate to the parents that the promotion and advancement of learning skills should be our main goal.

Though more needs to be done, the project definitely contributed to the improvement of relations between the home and school in that it created a climate in which misunderstandings and disagreements could be minimized through open communication. It appeared as if a basis was

established whereby the writer and parents realized that they know the child in different contexts, and that now we may be better aware of what the child is like in the other context.

Medium of Contact

Although parents were contacted via e-mail, letter, home visits, and parental visitations, the telephone was the medium most often utilized. When personal contact had already been established, the telephone was very convenient but without initial face-to-face interaction, communication would have become far too impersonal. Out of a total of thirteen parents the writer was successful in establishing face-to-face contact with ten of them. The writer admits to involving some parents more than others, and the problem can be attributed to a clash of work commitments of the parties concerned. Compounding the problem, however, was the fact that once contact was established, there was the added difficulty of coordinating cooperative activities.

Parental Satisfaction

Mothers were not only more involved than the fathers but throughout the year they displayed more of a desire to want to be informed. Most fathers, however, tended to take the notion that education was the responsibility of the mothers. In the future more of a concerted effort needs be done to dispel this traditional attitude, and promote more involvement by the fathers. In the Parent Questionnaire (Appendix D) 4 of the parents involved reported a definite approval of the project as a learning experience, while 3 responded that it was somewhat supportive. When asked if they now feel more ready to teach their child, 4 said 'definitely', 2 said 'somewhat', while 1 said 'not at all'. It is significant to note that these responses were directly proportional to the amount of home-school

collaboration, and definitely supports a positive correlation between parent involvement and teacher initiative.

Incidentally, one of the project's students, Michelle, won the year-end award given to the grade nine student who has demonstrated the most improvement and dedication to learning. Her mother directly attributed her daughter's improvement to the increased involvement of the family and school.

Student Satisfaction

In the Student Questionnaire (Appendix D) all seven students indicated a definite approval of the experience as being supportive of learning. The writer questions this blanket approval and suggests that some students were biased towards satisfying their teacher. Largely due to a lack of communication early in the school year, the responses of some students demonstrated that they equated learning as completing and passing in assignments on time.

The lengthy extension of the project was concern for some students in that they did not approve of the spacing of *Romeo and Juliet* activities around other material in the language arts course. Particularly at the end of the school year this frustration may explain why some were struggling through certain strategies, an occurrence that was counter-productive to true learning. It is also significant to note that the deterioration in work quality reflected this lower state of motivation.

Input of Teachers and Other Personnel

There were instances where certain participants did not fully comprehend precisely how they fit within the structure, thus making it more difficult to adapt certain strategies to meet each student's specific needs. Though their involvement was not considerable, the contribution of the administration and some district personnel proved to be invaluable in strengthening the home-school partnership. The

main obstacle was that, after referring certain students and/or parents, the heavy workload of the district personnel prevented a thorough examination of the issue at hand. When certain case studies were made available, either the school year was almost completed or the results were not conclusive enough to be of any assistance in identifying the nature of the student's learning difference. There were occasions where they were flexible enough to give a basic analysis of the situation and this information was useful in devising certain strategies for particular individuals.

The Project's Activities

The students generally appreciated the variety in the selected strategies, as well as the minimal amount of reading and writing that was required to complete them. Surprisingly these activities proved to be very conducive to both parent-child and student-peer collaboration. Allowing for more student-centered and less teacher-dominated activities appeared to be appreciated by the parent and child in that they had more control over the tone and direction of the learning situations. Oftentimes, the home involvement resulted in achieving certain goals that the writer would have chosen himself.

It was very satisfying to see the writer's suggestions followed, in that the home sometimes adapted an activity so as to more readily complement the interest level and ability of the child. One student's cartoon depicted the plot of *Romeo and Juliet* with, for this particular student, surprising accuracy reinforcing the notion that children learn in different ways and at different rates and, that by individualizing instruction, we give them another tool to demonstrate their capabilities. Though in some cases there may have been extenuating circumstances, it was very disappointing that for certain activities the parents sometimes did not sufficiently do their part in ensuring their completion.

The activities were moderately successful in facilitating the learning of social skills. One parent,

in particular, acknowledged that her daughter's avoidance of conflict with another student was directly attributable to the project's social skills exercise.

Student Achievement

It is very difficult to assess to which skills the home-school involvement contributed. When the students demonstrated higher than normal interest in an activity, the writer tended to be generous with the grading of the students' efforts. Academic improvement was certainly a concern, but the focus was mainly on improving attitudes and allowing instructional strategies to encourage and nurture learning. The writer considered it a resounding success that lower achieving students, who ordinarily possessed low self-esteem, displayed improved motivation in efforts generated from a Shakespearean piece of work.

Parents reported that the project's collaborative effort resulted in better communication between themselves and their children, indeed in one case between a grandfather and child. One mother commented on the positive benefits of a visit the teacher made to the home in that, for three weeks after the visit, communication between her and her daughter improved. There were times, however, when parents reported that tension occurred while working on certain activities, and thus parental involvement became counterproductive.

Whether it was the home-school cooperation, the activities themselves, or a combination of both, three of the students became more comfortable with presentations in front of the class. Oftentimes, one student's new-found enthusiasm for reading to the class accounted for the group selecting her to be their reporter.

The Writer's Satisfaction

The project was a success for the writer in that it dispelled the notion that work and time commitments prevent the teacher from enlisting the help of parents. In the initial stages of the *Romeo and Juliet* unit of work the delivery will expectantly be time-consuming, but once properly implemented and more experience is gained, it can in certain cases actually serve to lessen a teacher's workload. When compared to other non-project activities, for example, there appeared to be an improvement in the amount of time lower achieving students took in completing the project's assigned tasks. Since parents were aware of the activities and strategies and their input was valued, it must be assumed that they impressed upon their child the importance of completing the appropriate material.

The writer realizes that the positive results of this unit of work support the need for developing individual programs for lower achieving students, programs that enable them to realize that learning can be active, personal and productive. To accomplish this goal the focus must be on more meaningful parental involvement, and this should start with a realization that all parents have strengths and that they possess a great deal of valuable information about their children.

Summary

In general it appeared that the parents and students enjoyed participating in this project and found the format to be an effective learning experience. The collaboration between all-concerned contributed positively to an improvement in relations between the home and school. Some parents expressed concern over their not being proficient in providing instruction and information to their child, while some students did not appreciate having their parents so heavily involved in their schooling. The writer now recognizes these difficulties and suggests that future offerings of this type of project

promote, as early as possible in the school year, more frequent group interaction where practical suggestions can be offered.

Determining whether there was a measurable increase in academic achievement was beyond the scope of this paper, but the majority of the project's students did appear to demonstrate an improved attitude. Some parents admitted to the project as having contributed to improving communication between themselves and their children. Two of the students displayed an improvement in social interaction, particularly among their peer group, while one student appeared to gain greater confidence in speaking in front of the class.

The various activities provided by the writer were viewed positively by most parents, but interest in them lessened towards the latter stages of the project. This circumstance appeared to parallel that of their child and can probably be attributed to the lengthiness of the project rather than any disenchantment with the home-school partnership experience. The flexibility of the activities allowed the parents and their children to adapt to individual differences, thus contributing to more learning engagement. The amount of time the students invested in the project's activities was comparable to, if not greater than, the amount of time a student would invest in other traditional activities.

CHAPTER SIX

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Recommendations

The project has provided an opportunity to reflect upon and monitor various aspects of the teaching of *Romeo and Juliet* based on the use of parental involvement in the implementation of teaching strategies described in research literature. The choice of these methods was influenced by the stated course objectives, the appropriate teaching strategy, and the flexibility of the parents' agenda. All involved reported having appreciated the experience and the majority felt that it had met most of the stated objectives.

It would be convenient to suggest that educators would achieve similar success if they availed of the procedures outlined in this paper. However, this would be impractical since there are numerous variables associated with a specific combination of students, parents, teachers, availability of time, and delivery methods. Nevertheless, there are a number of issues that need to be addressed which might be considered when setting up a *Romeo and Juliet* unit of work based upon the implemented strategies.

Attempts should be made to involve as many personnel as will be productive.

The author tended to be biased towards focussing parental involvement exclusively on mothers and their children but, where appropriate and feasible, more of a concerted effort needs to be made to include fathers in the unit of work. By targeting fathers, schools may be able to make greater gains in parental involvement, since the mothers were already exhibiting some degree of participation in their children's education.

Traditionally, when compared to the mothers', the fathers' knowledge of their children's

schooling has been limited. All parents appeared to be pleased that the activities within this project did not center around rote memorization material. They were constructed so that most adults, with a minimal amount of instruction, could effectively contribute to their kids' learning experiences. Though minimal in nature, when the fathers did get involved, the effort was a positive force in their children's schooling.

The author realizes that there are other relatives like grandparents, aunts, uncles, or even older siblings that have the potential to be effective participants in the students' education. In the project, for example, there was one situation where a grandfather became involved in an activity, but the activity was completed before the author had an opportunity to form an opinion as to the effectiveness of the involvement. Further investigation is necessary to reveal whether follow up activities can be designed to take advantage of these unplanned types of interactions.

With greater frequency educational leaders are calling for closer professional interaction among teachers and between teachers and administrators—in other words, a greater degree of collaboration in the schools. Throughout the *Romeo and Juliet* unit of work the administration was well-informed and indeed contributed positively to the operations of the project. Unfortunately, the other subject teachers, guidance councillor, district personnel, and the special education teacher did not receive sufficient consultation. There was no problem engaging school personnel; the problem was when, where, and how to involve them. This deficiency requires attention in order to prevent the typical school practices that isolate colleagues from one another, and encourages cooperation among the concerned educators.

The writer suggests that the project would be more effective when there is more involvement of the special education teacher, but this involvement must be as part of a joint effort to achieve the prescribed objectives, not an attempt to review material for an upcoming exam. The cooperation of

these resource teachers is invaluable in that they have lengthy daily contact with low achievers and, oftentimes, throughout the students' schooling. The writer's past experience suggests that, when given proper direction, these resource teachers are only too willing to change their focus, and work collaboratively to pool the strengths of all-concerned.

An approximate number of participants that will collaborate in the project should be determined as early as possible.

The writer realizes that the time commitment necessary for delivering the *Romeo and Juliet* unit of work will be dependent on the number of students and home personnel involved. It is suggested that in the first few years of this type of project too great an involvement will result in a taxing workload that tends to become counterproductive, therefore, the format will be better suited to a group of four or five students. With more experience, however, the teacher should learn to prevent certain obstacles that are typically encountered when implementing new strategies.

Teachers are responsible for helping all students learn.

The writer questions the educational effectiveness of taking students out of the regular classroom and providing little beyond remedial instruction. More and more educators have higher expectations for low-achieving students and expect them to keep up with a more demanding content. As classrooms become more diverse in terms of the types of learners, instructional procedures that benefit *all* learners will be invaluable to regular classroom teachers. The goal of teachers should be that every student, regardless of individual differences, be included in the mainstream of school life. It is recommended by the writer that all students, regardless of ability, could benefit in varying degrees from the *Romeo and Juliet* unit of work and thus should be exposed to the project's activities.

The writer has observed few endeavors that effectively accommodate lower achievers within the core or regular programs. To lessen the workload and improve the quality of education, the teacher must consult and collaborate with the home as well as any school or community personnel whose knowledge or experience contributes to make students life-long learners. The teacher must endeavor to contest the preconceived notions that certain students just can not or will not learn. Gains in students' learning have the potential for even greater growth when those who have a vested interest actively support the use of instructional strategies that include cognitive and behavioral elements.

To effectively teach the unit of work the teacher must be knowledgeable about practical teaching strategies, particularly those that involve the home in education.

Recent research calls for teachers to teach differently from the way they were taught; therefore, educators must re-think their subject matter in order to implement these instructional strategies. This will likely necessitate further education through formal university courses, personal reading or professional workshops. Teachers must be willing to learn from each other by participating in a peer review of each others teaching. Having teachers learn how to involve parents in school learning would be an excellent topic for staff development.

To make personal contact with parents requires a great investment of time, energy and materials, as well as a personal commitment to teach in a variety of ways to adapt to the various needs of adolescents. This implies that teachers must enjoy and value the teenagers and their subject matter. The junior high teacher must understand adolescent behavior, and develop supportive learning environments that promote appropriate educational experiences.

The home needs to be consulted as early as possible to maximize their contribution to their children's social and academic growth.

The writer discovered that parents do want to become involved in the education of their child, but to do so more effectively they need proper direction. With guidance and support, they may become increasingly involved in home learning activities that enable them to teach, to be models for, and to guide their children. The goal should not only be to involve them in parental interviews, but to collaborate with them on a day-to-day basis. Recognizing the relative competence of parents is likely to reinforce their self-confidence and promote their active involvement in helping their child.

The number of strategies found in this paper may have appeared to be excessive but, in order to adapt to the various levels and interests of every child, they were not given to all the project's students. Nevertheless, the writer expected far too much material to be covered thus, in retrospect, it is suggested that the various assignments be given to the parents and the children earlier in the school year, where discussions could be entertained as to which activities they might want to accept. It is recommended that the school advise them that, in consultation with the teacher, they have an option of altering the type, number, and/or presentation of the chosen activities.

If teachers are to see the lower achieving child in relation to the family, then considerable information is needed. To understand each child individually requires extensive observation, and consultation with parents is essential since they are usually the primary attachment figures and, therefore, are well equipped to provide relevant information. As early as possible the school has a responsibility to involve the appropriate professionals in an attempt to determine the reasons behind the student being an underachiever. When working with parents who have no clear-cut diagnosis as to their child's educational needs, a teacher should be especially supportive and instill the confidence the

parents lack in themselves. Parents will then know that their contributions are valued and they will sense the teacher's desire to establish a positive partnership with them.

Avail of any home resources that contributes to effective learning.

The educational worth of the computer is readily accepted, but parents need be informed that children learn in different ways and at different rates and that the television, radio, newspaper, video camera, tape recorder, and comic book are but a few of the other home resources that, with proper training, can be utilized to teach their children. Teachers and parents should be aware, however, that process skills and thinking skills are not acquired by osmosis from the resources themselves. The focus is no longer on students learning by being immersed in educational technology, but rather on students developing information literacy, which is directly related to processes, such as how students find, use, select, reject, and interpret information critically. These process skills are taught in schools but they are not always taught directly or consistently through adequate development and reinforcement.

An ongoing evaluation of this unit of work must be entertained.

Not only must the teacher ask colleagues, parents, and students to offer constructive criticism of their teaching practices, but they must also be self-critical. Initiators of this type of project must critically analyse their assumptions and feelings underlying their efforts and then speculate about how these assumptions and feelings affect their actions with the goal of improving the delivery of their practice. It should be kept in mind that, while implementing a number of strategies may provide a more interesting learning environment, each activity needs to be examined according to its strengths and weaknesses within a particular delivery approach. If the teacher is not too critical or excessively lenient, then positive change can result.

The author was sufficiently self-critical but made the mistake of mentally noting where most problems or successes were occurring, rather than writing them down on paper. The result was that some of the massive amount of pertinent information was lost, tending to sometimes give a distorted view of certain situations. In addition, though the writer realized that certain strategies were not going as well as hoped, the lessons learned did not always receive sufficient consideration in succeeding activities.

The writer favored a subjective assessment of the students' efforts generated from the unit of work.

Evaluating students' work was probably the most challenging part of teaching the *Romeo and Juliet* unit of work. It not only takes a tremendous amount of time and demands a great deal of intellectual activity, but the grading, as well as the teachers' responses, will likely affect how students feel about their ability to write. The writer attempted to steer away from the role of an examiner who tends to spend enormous amounts of time grading every paper, and instead became a facilitator who helps students recognize and focus on their own strengths and weaknesses, thus enhancing individual development as well as encouraging more student writing.

To achieve this goal, teachers should respond to student drafts with fewer judgments and directives and more thought questions and suggestions. Throughout the project an attempt was made to measure the growth quality of students' writing by comparing before and after samples of complete pieces of writing. To eliminate much of the uncertainty and frustration of measuring the quality of these samples, the writer tried to match the type of discourse with individual students and create exercises which stimulate writing in their appropriate range but not beyond it.

The evaluation of the students had to be subjective in nature; due to school policy however, a

cumulative grade had to be given at the end of the unit of work. Each activity was assessed on its own merit and credit was given for each evaluation instrument that was used during the total process. The following methods were included in the students' assessment:

- reader-based feedback to peer writing
- individualized assignments (verbal, written, model making)
- group projects (Internet projects like the *Romeo and Juliet* web page)
- cooperative learning activities
- journal writing
- student portfolio
- unit tests
- parent-student-teacher collaboration (phone calls/interviews/questionnaires)
- peer and parental assessment (verbal commentaries)

Through the various assessment techniques an attempt was made to support the expected outcomes of the project, and many of these outcomes were addressed through subjective evaluation. With respect to a student's reading and writing goals, the writer attempted to purposefully design assignments whose focus would hopefully satisfy one or more of these goals and, by adjusting scoring and grading procedures individually based on student background and prior achievement, fairness is directly addressed. All in all, it appears that true growth in learning is a slow, seldom linear process, and teachers can offer students a wide variety of opportunities to demonstrate that they are active learners.

Effective planning is key to realizing the project's objectives.

Time, support, resources, monitoring, and dedication are key elements in accomplishing the goals of the *Romeo and Juliet* unit of work but the most cohesive objective is effective planning. District planning helps ensure that all resources and appropriate staff development sessions will be made available. Principals play an extremely important leadership role in facilitating collaborative efforts of the instructional personnel. Planning is essential in determining which students will be part of

the collaborative process. Above all, the planning must be ongoing to enable teachers to review progress on a regular basis, make adjustments, evaluate students, and develop new strategies in addressing problems either in discipline or learning.

Conclusions

The process of developing and presenting a *Romeo and Juliet* unit of work to lower achieving grade nine students has resulted in valuable insights in both how to develop and to teach the project using activities that avail of parental involvement. The two most striking learning experiences were the need to plan all aspects of the course in detail before any presentation to the students or parents, and that knowing the student is equally as important as knowing the course.

The project's activities are very flexible but their effectiveness will be dependent on a number of predetermined factors. Not only must the teacher seek the cooperation of the relevant district and school personnel, but also have prior knowledge of the family situation, and the various student learning styles. Contingent on the above practices is that the teacher have good communication skills and have a genuine concern for improving the education of all children. The initial planning stages are extremely time-consuming but the expected improvement in students' learning, as well as the improved relations between home and school, will pay dividends.

The need to create an effective home learning environment is as critical as it is in the every-day classroom. Developers of the project's activities and learning environments must be cognizant of the characteristics of the child and family. The teacher must realize that low achieving students and, oftentimes their parents, tend to have had undermining school experiences that likely demoralized them and, therefore, learning experiences need to be created that allow the parents and their children to

believe that their efforts make a difference in outcomes. Educators must remind themselves that, while introducing a number of activities may provide an interesting alternative to traditional exercises, each activity must be examined on its own merit within a particular delivery approach.

It is not suggested that the project's unit of work has the capacity to change the deep-rooted factors that separate lower achieving students from their fellow classmates but, with varying degrees of success, the *Romeo and Juliet* activities have the potential to lessen the gap. Meaningful change will occur when there is joint effort on the part of the home and school to combine their many talents and abilities and work together to create an extensive assortment of learning opportunities.

The circumstances of every project delivery will, with varying degrees of success, be different. Depending on the desire and personal constraints of the home and student, facilitators of this type of project need not feel constrained to follow its time frame, but are encouraged to drop, add, or alter any of the activities. Though the writer questions the effectiveness of a too lengthy experience with *Romeo and Juliet*, a longer time frame does allow for a greater opportunity to adapt to individual differences. A teacher has the prerogative to opt out of the project when circumstances warrant it, realizing that the basis for home-school collaboration may have already been established, and should at opportune times still strive to strengthen parental involvement.

The success of this project is dependant on parental participation in the students' education. Meeting the objectives of the unit of work will be more effective when earlier, meaningful contact is established. Educators must make themselves available even at off hours to establish lines of communication and ensure their continuance.

The task of preparing and delivering this type of *Romeo and Juliet* project will doubtless be challenging and involve a number of uncertainties. The end result, however, can be an effective engagement in learning for lower achieving students by utilizing diverse, purposeful, and meaningful interventions that reinforce the home-school connection.

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APPENDIX A

Copy of Intent Form

Intent Form to the John Cabot School Board

To Whom It May Concern:

I am presently in the process of completing my Master of Education in Teaching and Learning at Memorial University. With your permission I will attempt a project that will integrate *Romeo and Juliet* into the grade nine language arts program. The main focus of this project will be, through parent-teacher-student involvement, to develop a series of carefully chosen strategies, activities, and materials that will attempt to meet the individual needs of lower achieving students. I am requesting your permission to implement the necessary steps towards completion of this project. Hopefully, many of the recommended activities and ideas will help to create an environment that is more relevant to the individual student.

This project will involve collaboration with parents of lower achieving children, as well as other teachers and district personnel, to promote across-the-curriculum cooperation. The aforementioned will participate in a Board approved in service that addresses how home and school can effectively cooperate to ensure that students are engaged in real learning. All pertinent teachers, parents, and district personnel will be asked to participate and they will be informed that participation may be terminated at any time. This project will be ongoing during the school year of September 1999 to June 2000. All meetings or interactions will be at the convenience of the personnel involved.

All information gathered in this project is strictly confidential and at no time will individuals be identified. Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw permission at any time. Upon completion of this paper and on request, it will be made available for your perusal.

If you are in agreement with this project, please sign below and return one copy to me. The second copy is for your files. If you have any concerns or questions, please do not hesitate to speak with me at John Cabot Junior High (999-0000) or at home (999-1111). If at any time you wish to speak with a resource person not associated with the project, please contact the Associate Dean, Graduate Programs and Research at MUN or my supervisor, Dr. Tim Seifert, (tel.737-4470 or e-mail address: tseifert@morgan.ucs.mun.ca).

I look forward to working with you and your school personnel.

Yours sincerely,

Allan Norman

I, _____, on behalf of the John Cabot School Board, hereby give permission for Allan Norman to participate in a study on the integration of *Romeo and Juliet* into the language arts curriculum at John Cabot Junior High School for the school year 1999-2000. I understand that participation is entirely voluntary and that participation can be terminated at any time. All information is strictly confidential and no participating individual will be identified.

(For John Cabot School Board)

(Date)

With minor adjustments a form similar to the above was forwarded to the principal, parents, teachers and district personnel.

APPENDIX B

Profiles of Project's Students

The written remarks on each of the students below are a combination of teacher's comments in each child's cumulative record, as well as assessments by the various specialists within the school district. Prior to the project, all of the students displayed learned helplessness in that they did not monitor their performance nor make accurate attributions for personal success and/or failure. They did not believe that there was any connection between their actions or efforts and their performance and/or outcomes. These individuals did not think they had any control over their thinking, learning, or motivation, and thus tended to put a minimum of effort into school-related activities.

Frank

In Frank's case, dyslexia is suspected but has not been confirmed. He has a very outgoing, pleasant personality, but tends to be very immature for his fifteen years. He finds it very hard to concentrate as his attention span is extremely short; even focusing on a story being read is a challenge for him. He is easily distracted in class causing him to miss instruction, directions, and suggestions, thus will be very dependent on those around him. Frank needs a great deal of individual attention and constant reminders to stay on task, as well as encouragement to do his best at all times. He has been on a Pathways Three Program since entering the Junior High School.

Canadian Test of Basic Skills

Grade 7, 1997

Results (in national percentile ranks)	V	R	Language				
			L1	L2	L3	L4	LT
Frank	19	9	3	6	19	12	5
School	44	59	43	46	51	46	47
District	32	42	39	46	49	40	44
Province	45	52	49	57	58	52	55
Canada	50	50	50	50	50	50	50

V - Vocabulary R - Reading Comprehension L1 - Spelling L2 - Capitalization L3 - Punctuation
L4 - Usage and Expression

Mary

Though she has a very outgoing, pleasant personality, Mary's talkativeness to fellow students prevents her from completing constructive, independent work. She even has difficulty cooperating in group activities and too often depends on other members to complete the tasks. In a one-on-one conversation Mary will oftentimes surprise you with her general knowledge, leading one to believe that her low marks do not reflect her overall ability. Though she often demonstrates a lack of self confidence, she loves to read in front of the class.

Canadian Test of Basic Skills

Grade 7, 1997

Results (in national percentile ranks)	V	R	Language				
			L1	L2	L3	L4	LT
Mary	9	24	16	33	26	12	19
School	44	59	43	46	51	46	47
District	32	42	39	46	49	40	44
Province	45	52	49	57	58	52	55
Canada	50	50	50	50	50	50	50

V - Vocabulary R - Reading Comprehension L1 - Spelling L2 - Capitalization L3 - Punctuation
L4 - Usage and Expression

Tanya

Tanya was assessed September of 1998 and found intellectually to be in the slow learner range. Her academic performance appears to be consistent with cognitive ability, although math is stronger than the reading skills. She has difficulty expressing her ideas clearly in written form, and needs extra help in all areas. In the past her efforts have been unsuccessful, but it is highly likely that, when she sees peers receive praise for their work, Tanya becomes unresponsive to school-related events and tends to abandon effort. She lacks a sensitivity to others and possesses a very poor perception of social situations, which leads to unacceptable patterns of behavior. Her inappropriate actions, not only result in impaired learning, but also ensure that she remain socially unacceptable to other students in the school. During the past three years of junior high, Tanya has been absent a total of 175 days.

Canadian Test of Basic Skills

Grade 7, 1997

Results (in national percentile ranks)	V	R	Language				
			L1	L2	L3	L4	LT
Tanya	9	28	7	8	6	9	3
School	44	59	43	46	51	46	47
District	32	42	39	46	49	40	44
Province	45	52	49	57	58	52	55
Canada	50	50	50	50	50	50	50

V - Vocabulary R - Reading Comprehension L1 - Spelling L2 - Capitalization L3 - Punctuation
L4 - Usage and Expression

Lorraine

Lorraine's reading and writing output tends to be low performance. For a number of years our school had suspected her as having some mild cognitive delay. Our belief was confirmed after a recent in-depth diagnosis was completed by the appropriate personnel. Lorraine's socialization skills are extremely poor especially in the case of peer interaction. She has great difficulty with determining what reality is and her exaggerations and distortions of the truth have been the basis of many disagreements, particularly with her teachers.

Canadian Test of Basic Skills

Grade 7, 1997

Results (in national percentile ranks)	V	R	Language				
			L1	L2	L3	L4	LT
Lorraine	3	36	23	6	1	4	2
School	44	59	43	46	51	46	47
District	32	42	39	46	49	40	44
Province	45	52	49	57	58	52	55
Canada	50	50	50	50	50	50	50

V - Vocabulary R - Reading Comprehension L1 - Spelling L2 - Capitalization L3 - Punctuation
L4 - Usage and Expression

Dennis

A very friendly individual with good communication skills and a positive home environment, Dennis struggles academically. His low performance can probably be attributed to his being unmotivated rather than cognitive delay or any learning disability. He rarely focuses on the task at hand, preferring to attract the attention of his fellow students. It is this inattentiveness that has resulted in Dennis not achieving his true potential.

Canadian Test of Basic Skills

Grade 7, 1997

Results (in national percentile ranks)	V	R	Language				
			L1	L2	L3	L4	LT
Dennis	6	16	20	10	71	24	30
School	44	59	43	46	51	46	47
District	32	42	39	46	49	40	44
Province	45	52	49	57	58	52	55
Canada	50	50	50	50	50	50	50

V - Vocabulary R - Reading Comprehension L1 - Spelling L2 - Capitalization L3 - Punctuation
L4 - Usage and Expression

Jack

Due to his very weak reading and verbal skills, Jack is suspected as being cognitively delayed. He has a very positive home environment where parents will do their utmost to ensure he receives a quality education. Whenever he has been given the choice of receiving remedial help, he has been vehemently opposed, preferring to stay in the regular class. His very poor social skills with teachers and other adults are not as evident when observing his interaction with his peer group.

Canadian Test of Basic Skills

Grade 7, 1997

Results (in national percentile ranks)	V	R	Language				
			L1	L2	L3	L4	LT
Jack	27	51	10	8	9	6	4
School	44	59	43	46	51	46	47
District	32	42	39	46	49	40	44
Province	45	52	49	57	58	52	55
Canada	50	50	50	50	50	50	50

V - Vocabulary R - Reading Comprehension L1 - Spelling L2 - Capitalization L3 - Punctuation
L4 - Usage and Expression

Michelle

The writer was not able to obtain the results of Michelle's grade 7, 1997, Canadian Test of Basic Skills.

Michelle tends to struggle academically, but it is not due to lack of effort. She has very poor linguistic development which may in part be due to environment deprivation. A very pleasant girl, she responds favorably to individual attention and will try her best in a classroom environment. She tends to be very socially inactive around her teachers, but more especially around her peer group. When grouping occurs, Michelle will quietly remain in her seat until the teacher notices her situation and remedies it by placing her in the appropriate setting. At no time does she appear to be embarrassed, seeming to believe that it is a normal, acceptable situation for her.

John Cabot Junior High Family Profile

Child's Name: _____ Nickname: _____
Date of Birth: _____ Current Age: _____ Grade: _____

- I. Parents: Mother Father
- Name: _____
- Occupation: _____
- Place of Employment: _____
- Daytime Phone #: _____

2. List all the children in the family in chronological order beginning with the oldest:
- | Name: | Sex: | Age: |
|-------|-------|-------|
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |

3. Please list any other schools your child attended before coming to Cabot Junior High:

4. For each of the areas listed below, please note information that you feel would help the teacher to understand and work with your child.
(You may continue on the back of this page.)

- a) Child's strengths:

- b) Child's interests and after-school activities:**

- c) Personality and/or behavioral characteristics (e.g., feelings about school, nervousness, shyness, competitiveness, etc.):

- d) Recent family events or changes (e.g., death, divorce, new sibling, moving, etc.):

- e) Areas of academic difficulty or concern:

- ① Relationship with peers:

5. Are there any goals or expectations you have set or would like to set with your child this year?

6. How do you feel the teacher can best support your child's learning this year?

7. Are there any areas in which you as a parent would like to become involved in the classroom or the school?

8. Is there anything you think your child would like the teacher to know about him/her?

Please attach any additional comments or suggestions on a separate page.

This profile was completed by:

Parent or Guardian

Date

The above Family Profile was adapted from Swap (1993), p.181

APPENDIX D

Post-Questionnaire for Parents and Students

Frank's Mother

This project has stressed how invaluable home-school cooperation can be in lessening the apparent deficiencies that exist in meeting the needs of lower achieving students. With that goal in mind, please respond to each of the following statements:

The experience was supportive of effective learning.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
Individual participation was encouraged.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
Facilitators were interested in my contribution.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
Sufficient time was provided to grasp ideas.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
A variety of effective strategies were given.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
I feel more ready to teach my child.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>

What was the most positive thing you have gained from this experience?

I know now that, if he tries harder, he can do more than what he does.

What was the most negative thing you experienced?

I can't think of anything negative; you certainly kept in close contact with us.

Do you think your child has benefited from the cooperative efforts of the home and school? Please elaborate.

Yes, I do because he looks up on things differently. He grasps things better than before. The modified helpers do too much for him. This makes him lazier than he is. He relies too much on them. When he gets to the high school, he won't get this attention; so he won't be able to grasp the ideas.

Would you participate in further projects of this nature? Why or why not?

Yes, it helps me understand more of what he is going through.

What suggestions for improvement would you make for this type of project?

I don't know if you can do any more than what you've done. You've done everything you can; Frank just lost interest.

Mary's Mother

This project has stressed how invaluable home-school cooperation can be in lessening the apparent deficiencies that exist in meeting the needs of lower achieving students. With that goal in mind, please respond to each of the following statements:

The experience was supportive of effective learning.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
Individual participation was encouraged.	Not at all	<u>Somewhat</u>	Definitely
Facilitators were interested in my contribution.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
Sufficient time was provided to grasp ideas.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
A variety of effective strategies were given.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
I feel more ready to teach my child.	Not at all	<u>Somewhat</u>	Definitely

What was the most positive thing you have gained from this experience?

That the project has been really good for her. A lot of time has been spent on helping her.

What was the most negative thing you experienced?

You spent a lot of time helping her, but it's too bad we couldn't get to the meetings.

Do you think your child has benefited from the cooperative efforts of the home and school? Please elaborate.

Yes, I really think she got a lot out of it.

Would you participate in further projects of this nature? Why or why not?

Yes, it has been a good experience for her.

What suggestions for improvement would you make for this type of project?

I don't know how she is going to do the next time someone works with her.

Tanya's Mother

This project has stressed how invaluable home-school cooperation can be in lessening the apparent deficiencies that exist in meeting the needs of lower achieving students. With that goal in mind, please respond to each of the following statements:

The experience was supportive of effective learning.	Not at all	<u>Somewhat</u>	Definitely
Individual participation was encouraged.	Not at all	<u>Somewhat</u>	Definitely
Facilitators were interested in my contribution.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
Sufficient time was provided to grasp ideas.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
A variety of effective strategies were given.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
I feel more ready to teach my child.	Not at all	<u>Somewhat</u>	Definitely

What was the most positive thing you have gained from this experience?

I now understand more of what goes on with kids in school. For awhile something worked well for her in school., then two or three weeks later she went back to her same old self.

What was the most negative thing you experienced?

I don't know if there was anything!

Do you think your child has benefited from the cooperative efforts of the home and school? Please elaborate.

The benefits were short term, bet then it bounced off the wall. I blame Tanya, though, for not trying to do her part.

Would you participate in further projects of this nature? Why or why not?

It depends on what she 's going to do when she goes back to school. If she's going to be the same old Tanya, then I'm not going to have much to do with her school work.

What suggestions for improvement would you make for this type of project?

That the teachers talk honestly, tell the truth. Say what you got to say and get on with it. That's what I do. From my point of view, it is not easy to deal with my daughter. You got to be in my shoes to understand how hard it is to deal with Tanya's moods.

Lorraine's Mother

This project has stressed how invaluable home-school cooperation can be in lessening the apparent deficiencies that exist in meeting the needs of lower achieving students. With that goal in mind, please respond to each of the following statements:

The experience was supportive of effective learning.	Not at all	<u>Somewhat</u>	Definitely
Individual participation was encouraged.	Not at all	<u>Somewhat</u>	Definitely
Facilitators were interested in my contribution.	Not at all	<u>Somewhat</u>	Definitely
Sufficient time was provided to grasp ideas.	Not at all	<u>Somewhat</u>	Definitely
A variety of effective strategies were given.	Not at all	<u>Somewhat</u>	Definitely
I feel more ready to teach my child.	Not at all	<u>Somewhat</u>	Definitely

What was the most positive thing you have gained from this experience?

The way you talk to her. You slow down. You don't make her feel bad. When three of us had a get-together, you're the one who talked about the things she did right - like she spoke up in class, brought stuff to school for Christmas decorations, or how good her attendance was. You boosted her ego; you made her stand taller.

What was the most negative thing you experienced?

You didn't contact me as often as I would have liked, but I didn't work with her enough either. I should have been continuously at her about homework. I sometimes let it slide by not contacting school.

Do you think your child has benefited from the cooperative efforts of the home and school? Please elaborate.

Yes, I've seen a difference. When we had an ISSP meeting, I saw a change in her. When she came home, she was smiling at the positive things that were said about her. I'm afraid of her going to the high school with not enough having been done for her in the lower grades. I'm ready to help but I don't feel able to do so. I went back to the college to get grade 12 to know how to help her with what she's doing in school.

Would you participate in further projects of this nature? Why or why not?

Yes, that way I'll know what she's doing. Sometimes the schoolwork she's doing I don't understand, so if someone told me what to do, I'd know how to help her.

What suggestions for improvement would you make for this type of project?

If they got the time, more one-on-one contact would help. I would not want them to contact me only when she's failing.

Dennis's Mother

This project has stressed how invaluable home-school cooperation can be in lessening the apparent deficiencies that exist in meeting the needs of lower achieving students. With that goal in mind, please respond to each of the following statements:

The experience was supportive of effective learning.	Not at all	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Definitely</u>
Individual participation was encouraged.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
Facilitators were interested in my contribution.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
Sufficient time was provided to grasp ideas.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
A variety of effective strategies were given.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
I feel more ready to teach my child.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>

What was the most positive thing you have gained from this experience?

The phone calls home. If there was any trouble, you made me aware of it. If you don't know what's going on, you can't do anything about it.

What was the most negative thing you experienced?

You didn't get to work with me often enough. Then again there are other teachers phoning and it gets confusing who's calling.

Do you think your child has benefited from the cooperative efforts of the home and school? Please elaborate.

Yes, when you gave him a compliment, he would come home and brag about how good the teacher is and that he likes you. He says that you are a nice teacher.

Would you participate in further projects of this nature? Why or why not?

Yes, because I want Dennis to get a good education. I will do anything to get him an education.

What suggestions for improvement would you make for this type of project?

Call home and set up meetings. Tell exactly where the problem is and what we can do about it. Give us more information on what homework he has to do, so he doesn't come home and say he's got none.

Jack's Father

This project has stressed how invaluable home-school cooperation can be in lessening the apparent deficiencies that exist in meeting the needs of lower achieving students. With that goal in mind, please respond to each of the following statements:

The experience was supportive of effective learning.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
Individual participation was encouraged.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
Facilitators were interested in my contribution.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
Sufficient time was provided to grasp ideas.	Not at all	<u>Somewhat</u>	Definitely
A variety of effective strategies were given.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
I feel more ready to teach my child.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>

What was the most positive thing you have gained from this experience?

It made me realize what he knew and didn't know.

What was the most negative thing you experienced?

It is hard to keep him on task.

Do you think your child has benefited from the cooperative efforts of the home and school? Please elaborate.

Yes, he now sees that he has to work harder and do his part.

Would you participate in further projects of this nature? Why or why not?

Yes, it helps me see the other side.

What suggestions for improvement would you make for this type of project?

To have more meetings with parents, teachers and the child.

Michelle's Mother

This project has stressed how invaluable home-school cooperation can be in lessening the apparent deficiencies that exist in meeting the needs of lower achieving students. With that goal in mind, please respond to each of the following statements:

The experience was supportive of effective learning.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
Individual participation was encouraged.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
Facilitators were interested in my contribution.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
Sufficient time was provided to grasp ideas.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
A variety of effective strategies were given.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
I feel more ready to teach my child.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>

What was the most positive thing you have gained from this experience?
Respect from the teachers and from Michelle.

What was the most negative thing you experienced?
I didn't get anything negative.

Do you think your child has benefited from the cooperative efforts of the home and school? Please elaborate.
Yes, if it wasn't for this parent-teacher cooperation. She would not have passed this year. It boosted her self-confidence.

Would you participate in further projects of this nature? Why or why not?
Yes, I found it was a great help to my daughter, and I found it helped me in many ways to deal with her, and it's given her a better chance on her school work.

What suggestions for improvement would you make for this type of project?
To get parents more involved and have teacher and parents consulting.

Frank

This project has stressed how invaluable to your education home-school cooperation can be. With that goal in mind, please respond to each of the following statements:

The experience was supportive of effective learning.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
Individual participation was encouraged.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
Facilitators were interested in my contribution.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
Sufficient time was provided to grasp ideas.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
A variety of effective strategies was given.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
I feel more ready to build on my learning skills.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>

What was the most positive thing you have gained from this experience?

Yes, because it helps me a lot.

What was the most negative thing you experienced?

To make a model of the priest in the play.

Do you think you have benefited from the cooperative efforts of the home and school? Please elaborate.

I couldn't read the words very well.

Would you participate in further projects of this nature? Why or why not?

Do more fun stuff.

What suggestions for improvement would you make for this type of project?

Yes, I didn't like some of the work, but sometimes I liked my mother helping me.

Mary

This project has stressed how invaluable to your education home-school cooperation can be. With that goal in mind, please respond to each of the following statements:

The experience was supportive of effective learning.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
Individual participation was encouraged.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
Facilitators were interested in my contribution.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
Sufficient time was provided to grasp ideas.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
A variety of effective strategies were given.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
I feel more ready to build on my learning skills.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>

What was the most positive thing you have gained from this experience?

This past summer I went to cadet camp at Gagetown, New Brunswick and they were impressed with my voice and the way I demonstrated and acted in front of a group. The way we did Romeo and Juliet gave me confidence to get in front of the class and explain to complete strangers. In school I was practising in front of peers which helped me later to do it in front of strangers.

What was the most negative thing you experienced?

Actually I don't think there was anything.

Do you think you have benefited from the cooperative efforts of the home and school? Please elaborate.

Yes, where mom and dad didn't see the movie, so I explained it to them in my point of view. I explained the movie in my point of view and got all the points in shorter form to make sure they could understand it. This helped me because as I explained it, I was helping myself understand it.

Would you participate in further projects of this nature? Why or why not?

Yes, because it was a lot of fun and where I like to read stuff and where I like nonfiction over fiction...the way we did it was more our point of view of what we would do if we were there. It helped me understand the play better.

What suggestions for improvement would you make for this type of project?

We could have gone on the Internet more and probably searched the web more. There were a lot of different sites where there were many points of view on Romeo and Juliet; we could have got more ideas and points of view.

Tanya

This project has stressed how invaluable to your education home-school cooperation can be. With that goal in mind, please respond to each of the following statements:

The experience was supportive of effective learning.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
Individual participation was encouraged.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
Facilitators were interested in my contribution.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
Sufficient time was provided to grasp ideas.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
A variety of effective strategies were given.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
I feel more ready to build on my learning skills.	Not at all	<u>Somewhat</u>	Definitely

What was the most positive thing you have gained from this experience?

Probably making up questions for the web page.

What was the most negative thing you experienced?

It was complicated trying to work at home and in the school, doing both of them.

Do you think you have benefited from the cooperative efforts of the home and school? Please elaborate.

Yes, well, it kind of helped me work a bit better in school doing stuff at home... like studying... stuff like that.

Would you participate in further projects of this nature? Why or why not?

Probably, it depends on what I am doing; how many people are doing it; how long it will take...stuff like that.

What suggestions for improvement would you make for this type of project?

Probably no way because everything you did was good.

Lorraine

This project has stressed how invaluable to your education home-school cooperation can be. With that goal in mind, please respond to each of the following statements:

The experience was supportive of effective learning.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
Individual participation was encouraged.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
Facilitators were interested in my contribution.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
Sufficient time was provided to grasp ideas.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
A variety of effective strategies were given.	Not at all	<u>Somewhat</u>	Definitely
I feel more ready to build on my learning skills.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>

What was the most positive thing you have gained from this experience?

It helps keep myself organized.

What was the most negative thing you experienced?

I am not sure.

Do you think you have benefited from the cooperative efforts of the home and school? Please elaborate.

Yes, but I didn't involve myself as much as I needed to.

Would you participate in further projects of this nature? Why or why not?

Yes, it helps me get into the kind of stuff I like. It gives me more interest to get into my reading. It gives me more knowledge or excitement.

What suggestions for improvement would you make for this type of project?

Give more involvement to the students, along with my mother...like curricular activities after school.

Dennis

This project has stressed how invaluable to your education home-school cooperation can be. With that goal in mind, please respond to each of the following statements:

The experience was supportive of effective learning.	Not at all	<u>Somewhat</u>	Definitely
Individual participation was encouraged.	Not at all	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Definitely</u>
Facilitators were interested in my contribution.	Not at all	<u>Somewhat</u>	Definitely
Sufficient time was provided to grasp ideas.	Not at all	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Definitely</u>
A variety of effective strategies were given.	Not at all	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Definitely</u>
I feel more ready to build on my learning skills.	Not at all	<u>Somewhat</u>	Definitely

What was the most positive thing you have gained from this experience?

I learned how to understand Romeo and Juliet a lot more.

What was the most negative thing you experienced?

Not enough on Romeo and Juliet but when we did it was too much in between. We were doing other things in between and it got us frustrated. If we would only stick to Romeo and Juliet all at once it would be better.

Do you think you have benefited from the cooperative efforts of the home and school? Please elaborate.

Yes, because if the teacher didn't phone home, I probably wouldn't have paid enough attention.

Would you participate in further projects of this nature? Why or why not?

Yes, it was fun; most people did I think.

What suggestions for improvement would you make for this type of project?

Have interviews with parents, teachers, and students.

Jack

This project has stressed how invaluable to your education home-school cooperation can be. With that goal in mind, please respond to each of the following statements:

The experience was supportive of effective learning.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
Individual participation was encouraged.	Not at all	<u>Somewhat</u>	Definitely
Facilitators were interested in my contribution.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
Sufficient time was provided to grasp ideas.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
A variety of effective strategies were given.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
I feel more ready to build on my learning skills.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>

What was the most positive thing you have gained from this experience?
I learned more about it and I understood it better.

What was the most negative thing you experienced?
The way Shakespeare wrote it.

Do you think you have benefited from the cooperative efforts of the home and school? Please elaborate.
Yes, I learned more and understood it better.

Would you participate in further projects of this nature? Why or why not?
Yes, to learn more about it, so I will do better at it.

What suggestions for improvement would you make for this type of project?
Done more models and acting out of skits.

Michelle

This project has stressed how invaluable to your education home-school cooperation can be. With that goal in mind, please respond to each of the following statements:

The experience was supportive of effective learning.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
Individual participation was encouraged.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
Facilitators were interested in my contribution.	Not at all	<u>Somewhat</u>	Definitely
Sufficient time was provided to grasp ideas.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
A variety of effective strategies were given.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>
I feel more ready to build on my learning skills.	Not at all	Somewhat	<u>Definitely</u>

What was the most positive thing you have gained from this experience?
How to cooperate with family members and teachers better.

What was the most negative thing you experienced?
There's no negative thing I learned.

Do you think you have benefited from the cooperative efforts of the home and school? Please elaborate.
Definitely, because I learned so much more this year than any other year.

Would you participate in further projects of this nature? Why or why not?
Yes, it gives you a better learning experience and helps you set more goals.

What suggestions for improvement would you make for this type of project?
Get taken out of certain classes, like religion, to get help.

