

IDENTITY OF WORK EXPERIENCE STUDENTS

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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IDENTITY OF WORK EXPERIENCE STUDENTS

by

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## Abstract

This research reports on the identity of a particular group of students in the regular school milieu - those who have been classified as special education students and placed in a senior special education class called Work Experience. The concept of identity is approached within a sociological context and the theoretical and methodological framework which informs the study derives from the symbolic interactionist approach.

The overriding research problem is the issue of identity as revealed in the students' own accounts as well as the implications of schooling on the social construction of identities. Data on which the research is based were taken from the responses of two groups of work experience students - one group composed of students currently in school in a work experience program and a second composed of former work experience students. Student observations were collected by means of questionnaires and interviews. Data collected were analyzed with the aim of pinpointing patterns with respect to similarities and differences in the experiences and identities of these students and with a commitment to student definitions, meanings and perspectives.

While there was a diversity of viewpoints and attitudes in the comments of the two groups of work

experience students, the underlying connecting theme identified was the positive fashion in which these individuals were able to define themselves. This self-definition is in spite of the negative connotations surrounding the position they occupy in school and the low-level occupational identities assumed outside school.

The importance of status passages for the development and maintenance of identity was raised by these two groups of students. The in-school students expressed their concern for regularized movement through grades and levels and through special education classes. The former students raised the elements of age and time as important factors influencing their decision to end student careers and make the transition to an identity in a working career.

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The importance of significant others in the lives and identities of these two groups of students was brought out. Parents and friends were seen as influential in sustaining and reinforcing the identities they held.

Regarding orientation to school the attitudes of the in-school students were more positive than those of former students. Placement in a work experience class was not seen by them as a shattering stigma or classification. The way they accommodated and rationalized negative situated identities enabled them to maintain positive identities for themselves as regular school students. Internalization of

self-identities was in some sense not related to their place in the school structure. For former students school had a lack of impact. They were more satisfied in their identities as wage-earners even though their work was sporadic with low pay and interspersed with periods of unemployment.

The major difference between the two groups was seen in their projected future identities. The in-school students expressed their desire to finish school and go on to further education. The former students were satisfied with their current circumstances.

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# Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract . . . . .	ii
Acknowledgements . . . . .	v
List of Tables . . . . .	ix
 CHAPTER I THE STUDY OF IDENTITY . . . . .	 1
Theoretical Approach . . . . .	2
Toward an Understanding of Identity . . . . .	6
Identity, Schooling and Career . . . . .	20
The Research Problem . . . . .	26
 CHAPTER II THE RESEARCH PROCESS . . . . .	 29
Description of Sample . . . . .	30
Community . . . . .	30
School . . . . .	31
Special Education . . . . .	32
In-School Students . . . . .	33
Out-of-School Students . . . . .	38
Data Collection . . . . .	40
In-School Students . . . . .	41
Out-of-School Students . . . . .	42
Questionnaire and Interview Techniques . . . . .	43
Data Analysis . . . . .	45

	Page
CHAPTER III IDENTITIES OF WORK EXPERIENCE STUDENTS. . .	48
Orientation to School . . . . .	48
Attitudes Toward School . . . . .	49
Reasons for Staying in School . . . . .	54
Perceptions of Subjects . . . . .	55
Perceptions of Teachers . . . . .	59
Interpretations of Failure . . . . .	62
Identification with the Work Experience Group . . . . .	66
Views about Work Experience . . . . .	67
Differences and Identity . . . . .	70
Current Success and Future Identities . . . . .	73
Significant Others . . . . .	77
Parents . . . . .	77
Friends . . . . .	83
Who Others Think I Am . . . . .	86
CHAPTER IV IDENTITY IN THE TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO WORK . . . . .	92
Retrospective Interpretations of School . . . . .	93
Reflections on School . . . . .	94
Impressions of Teachers . . . . .	96
Parental Role in Schooling . . . . .	99
Transition from School to work . . . . .	100
School as Preparation for the Work World . . . . .	101
Parental Attitudes and Influence . . . . .	103



	Page
Problems in Transition . . . . .	105
Attitudes and Life in the World of Work .	107
Persisting Orientation . . . . .	107
The Importance of Friends. . . . .	109
Employment and Satisfaction . . . . .	111
CHAPTER V SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS	116
Theoretical Orientation . . . . .	116
Research Methods. . . . .	119
Research Findings . . . . .	121
Theoretical Problems and Empirical Questions . . . . .	129
Practical Implications . . . . .	135
REFERENCES . . . . .	141
Appendix A Demographic Information . . . . .	145
Appendix B Questionnaire to In-School Work Experience Students. . . . .	148
Appendix C Who Others Think I Am. . . . .	152
Appendix D Questionnaire to Out-of-School Work Experience Students. . . . .	154

# W List of Tables

	Page
Table 1      Age and Gender of In-School Students. . . .	36
Table 2      Size of Family of Origin of In-School Students . . . . .	37
Table 3      Age and Gender of Out-of-School Students . . .	38
Table 4      Size of Family of Origin of Out-of-School Students. . . . .	40
Table 5      Who Others Think I Am: Student Interpretations of Parental Views. . . . .	88
Table 6      Who Others Think I Am: Student Interpretations of Views of Friends. . . . .	89
Table 7      Who Others Think I Am: Student Interpretations of Views of Teachers . . . . .	90

CHAPTER I  
THE STUDY OF IDENTITY

The term identity has points of contact with many disciplines and about as many meanings as there are theories which employ it. What is of interest in this study is the usage of the term in sociological thought. In a very significant sense identity is a pivotal sociological theme in that any reference to or discussion of identity raises the issue, if only implicitly, of the relationship between the individual and society. Within the field of sociology there are varying theoretical stances about man and his relationship to his world. Theoretical concerns centered on this issue bring up the problem of social control and other related controversies - free will vs determinism, process vs structure, micro vs. macro. In sociological theorizing there is the tendency toward polarization of views and differing levels of explanations are often seen as polar opposites. The study of meanings and interactions is often viewed as a competing orientation to the study of social structure. There is the tendency to view these orientations in terms of the subjective/objective dichotomy. This type of split, rather than leading to differing theoretical levels which could and should inform each other, often leads only to polemics.

We must overcome the objective/subjective dualism

and avoid accounts of identity which presume that the individual is determined by society or, by contrast, that which takes subjectivity for granted as an inherent characteristic. The first of these reduces the individual to nothing more than the determined outcome of social forces, while the second assumes that the subjective is not open to sociological analysis.

The conceptual framework which informs this present study derives from symbolic interactionism and its underlying premises can help us avoid the accounts of identity referred to above. As background to the present study the nature of symbolic interactionism and the basic principles of this approach are explicated. Then an attempt is made to move toward an understanding of identity within the perspective of symbolic interactionism. Subsequently, the emphasis is on identity in relation to school and career. The research problem is formulated in the final section of this chapter.

#### Theoretical Approach

The works of G.H. Mead (1934, 1936) laid the foundation to the sociological approach called symbolic interactionism. The elaborations of his works by others such as Blumer (1969), Strauss (1959), Strauss, et al. (1964) have established this approach as a theoretical con-

cern in sociology. As Hewitt (1976:59) points out, Mead's explanation of "self" seems to be an essential part of sociologists' efforts to account for the process whereby infants are turned into competent members of society. Indeed, the relationship of the individual to society, together with the nature of human society and the nature of man, is of central importance in this approach. Blumer (1969:61) shows that Mead in his system gave paramount importance to human society, showing it as necessary for the emergence of mind, self, consciousness and thereby individual identity. While Mead did not outline and develop his concept of society, Blumer (1969) makes explicit what he sees as implicit in Mead's works. Society is conceived of as process rather than structure. The essence of society is the ongoing process of action "consisting of the fitting together of acts to form joint action" (Blumer 1969:76). Society exists by the actions of individuals and their co-operative behaviour. It is an interactive process.

While society as group life, culture and institutions predate the individual, and exist independently of him, the significance of this world for man is one which he himself brings to it. Man is seen as an essentially self-producing being constructing his own action and interpreting that of others. This view does not deny the influence of the already-existing world on human individual identity and behaviour. The relationship between man and

society is a dialectical one and identity is the key element in that relationship (Berger and Luckmann, 1967:73). Individual identity emerges in society and is maintained, modified or changed through social processes. On the other hand, the identities produced by the interplay of society and organism react upon society maintaining, modifying or reshaping it.

Of equal importance to understanding the relationship between the individual and the social world are the inner composition and processes by which this relationship is accomplished. These are not left to be explained in full by biology, psychology or philosophy. Symbolic interactionism concentrates on how people make sense of the world, their meanings and interpretations, their perspectives and identities as they are constructed and reconstructed in everyday activity e.g. (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Schutz, 1967; Schutz and Luckmann, 1974).

Blumer (1969:2-21) has set out the basic postulates on which symbolic interactionism rests. First of all, human beings act toward things on the basis of the meaning that the things have for them. McCall and Simmons (1978:38-40) have elaborated on the idea that as human beings we inhabit two different worlds simultaneously. Man, as a biological being, is subject to instincts and drives of anatomy and physiology and exists where the external world is independent of him. Then, there is the social world, the

symbolic universe where man is conscious, self-conscious and reasoning. It is this world that is distinctly human and social, where symbols allow for the interpretations and meanings that are the focus of the interactionist approach.

Secondly, the meanings that things have for people are derived from, or arise out of, the social interaction one has with others. Meanings are not intrinsic to the object nor are they expressions of given psychological structures. Rather they are the constructions of people formed through the defining activities of people as they interact. They take place in a social context and in that sense they are social products.

Thirdly, these meanings are handled in and modified through an interpretation process used by people in dealing with the things they encounter. For symbolic interactionists meaning is not taken for granted as something already established. The individual is continually constructing, modifying and fitting together in a process of self interaction. It is through self-interaction that an individual manages his world, and constructs his own action. The way a particular individual handles the meaning of things will play a part in his actions toward them.

These constitute the main premises of symbolic interactionism and form the basis for the present study of identity. Throughout social interactions and underlying meanings in the course of daily living are the identities of

human actors being developed, modified, projected and re-modified.

### Toward an Understanding of Identity

Identity is the key element in man's social consciousness. Who am I? is the fundamental question posed and the answer relates to the processes of self and self-development in human society. In symbolic interactionism there is a concern for the central core of human beings and human living. How man comes to exist as man is of foremost importance. What we know as man, and what we call the individual in the specific sense, is not the biological entity, but comes to be by its own self-consciousness and that self-consciousness is a social one.

That the human child is born as an individual organism of a particular species is an elementary fact. The constituent elements of individual identity, the human body, the structure of consciousness and the basic determinants of social interaction are established in the "biogram" of the species (Luckmann, 1983:99). But the life of man the socius cannot be understood apart from the socio-historic situation in which he finds himself. That situation includes historically specific forms of social organization and a symbolically transmitted orientation to a culture. Within that society and culture are specific ways of defining,



perceiving and relating to others. It is in terms of and because of others in society who stand in reciprocal relationship to him that man exists as man. His concrete development is in face-to-face interaction. Individual identity is, therefore, as much a social construct as an individual creation.

Mead's exploration of the nature and genesis of the self is fundamental to an understanding of the dialectical nature of man's relationship to society, and to a conceptualization of identity. The self is seen as a reflexive process. Mead (1936:177) posited two aspects to the self as process - the "I" and the "me" - the self as subject and the self as object. The "I" designates the subject phase of the process in which people respond as acting subjects. It is the essentially unknowable, spontaneous aspect of human behaviour and experience. The "me" represents the object phase in which people can respond to themselves as objects in a situation. The "me" is the organized, cognitive frame of reference that is part of the incorporated other - those standards gained from others and individually elaborated (McCall and Simmons, 1978:53). This analysis of self as both subject and object, agent and product shows the reflexive character of self and the dialectical nature of man's relationship with society. The view avoids a deterministic, over-socialized concept of man. The "I" is not socially controlled and its inclusion allows

for the innovation and novelty that is part of human beings. The genesis of self and identity is in primary socialization. Through contact with significant others via the communication process and role-taking the child builds up a "generalized other" or standpoint from which he views himself and his behaviour (Meltzer, 1972:9-10). The "me" is formed and the individual begins to act toward himself in the same fashion in which he acts towards others. The "generalized other" Rose (1962:12) refers to as the "organized set of attitudes of others which one himself assumes". The formation in consciousness of the generalized other is a decisive phase in socialization.

Berger and Luckmann (1967:133) view the process as one of identity formation as one of internalization. This provides the basis for understanding others in the world and for the apprehension of the world as a meaningful social reality. In this process, society as objective reality becomes subjective reality as the child begins to view itself as an object, related to and differentiated from others. At the same time there is the establishment of a continuous and coherent identity. Stone's (1962:93) conception of identity relates to the "me", the self as object. Identity establishes "what and where a person is in social terms". When a person has identity he is "situated". Identity is not the same as self but becomes a meaning of

self if one "announces" the same words of identity that another assigns. It is only in the coincidence of placements and announcements that such an identity is integrated with self.

So the answer to who am I? is more than just a social label; it is a meaning of self. While the reflected appraisals of others are an important part of the development of identities they are not the complete meaning of identity. In the grosser forms of labelling theory there are some views of identity that are nothing more than labels forced unto us against our wills. This idea has been elaborated on by Brittan (1973) and Musgrove (1977). Without becoming embroiled in the controversies surrounding the labelling theory, it is necessary to make some distinctions in order to differentiate labels, concepts of identity and identity as used in this study.

Labels are essentially the imputation of certain classifications or qualities to a person. But the process whereby labels become part of a person's identity is not an automatic one. They can be internalized but not in some hit and miss kind of fashion. Stone's (1962) emphasis on identity as announcement on the part of the individual about his situation and the coincidence of these announcements with others' placements, pays needed attention to both aspects. Matza (1969) gives sustained focus to the actor and his meanings. Labelling, which he calls signification

is of little interest as long as it can be rationalized or accommodated or dealt with by the person. Labels are interesting but of little value unless they supply the actor with a basis for self-identification which becomes a meaning of self and a basis for action. Although identities are social constructions, they are not totally conferred from without. Those constructed are typically one's own. There is obviously a need to pay attention to and identify the circumstances, situations and factors which influence the interplay of labelling and self-labelling.

At this point it is necessary to make some distinctions regarding terminology and usage of the word identity in the literature. The mosaic of terms relating to differing aspects of identity and use of the same term with different meanings attached makes it very difficult to formulate any systematic account. Hewitt (1976:81) refers to the necessity of clearing out the "briarpatch". One basic distinction relates to persons as objects to self and to other people. As objects to others, people are subject to typifications, labels and judgements about who they are. It is noted that others' view of a person's position in a particular situation refers to a situated social identity. However, persons are not seen by others as fleeting, transitory sorts of beings, but as entities enduring over time. The term social identity is used by Hewitt (1976:81) to refer to others' cumulative sense of a person's place.

From the theoretical standpoint taken in this study the person as object to self is the principal concern. As object to oneself a person might have a sense of his position in a particular situation. This aspect is referred to as situated identity (Hewitt, 1976:81). Obviously a person's view of himself is not simply situated in time and space drawing meaning solely from contextual location. While some identities may have a temporary basis by being situated, there is, at the same time, a more "substantial" aspect of one's identity (Ball, 1972:80). Persons are enduring objects to themselves as well as ones constituted from moment to moment and one's identity in everyday life is experienced as a whole independent of time and space. Hewitt, (1976:81) distinguishes the biographical aspect of persons as objects to self from the situated aspect. He uses simply the term identity to refer to one's cumulative sense of place relative to others.

From the above, we can see that the situational aspects of human identities have to be taken into account, but more so we must be concerned with what becomes built into the more substantialist accounts of one's own identity. There are myriads of different situational identities and ephemeral aspects presented to us in the literature on identity. Authors such as Goffman (1959; 1971) have presented a language of theatre and performance to interpret everyday activity. Persons are seen as managing, masking,

performing and bargaining daily with identity being the commodity used. A game of charades seems to be what it is all about. While Goffman does not deny the reflexivity of self and identity, the concentration on situational aspects, performance and elements of drama leads one to speculate that there must be more than the hypocritical and superficial stance portrayed. Identity management and masking are elements of interaction and of projection of identities to others in everyday life. As such they are crucial to understanding the style and conduct of people in society. But they do not constitute the whole of identity. The emphasis on superficiality and externality seems to belie the reflexivity of self. While individuals can have a number of identities they are not simply donned at will to meet the demands of a particular situation. To use the words of Brittan (1973:153)

Identities are not worn on one's sleeve. They do tend to relate to critical life experiences. Masks on the other hand are forms of identities which are employed to maximize the benefits or minimize the losses accruing from social contexts. Masking employs the tactics of everyday hypocrisy and lying, whereas identity is intrinsically related to the self process ...

Another key aspect in the study of identity is the concept of roles. Role taking is an important idea in symbolic interactionist perspective. The emphasis is on role making as individuals construct their own roles in the course of interaction. They do not merely enact set-down

and prescribed roles as if from a script. McCall and Simmons (1978) employ the concept of role-identity as central to their examination of interactions in everyday life. Role-identities are seen as the meanings a person attributes to self in particular role situations - "more intuitively, such a role-identity is his imaginative view of himself as he likes to think of himself being and acting as an occupant of that position" (McCall and Simmons, 1978:65). Role identities differ from social roles. One "devises" role-identities and these are woven together into a systematic interrelated whole. McCall and Simmons (1978:74) posit a hierarchy of "prominence", which is similar to the "ideal self". There is the enduring hierarchy in terms of prominence and the fluid hierarchy of role-identities in terms of salience. Salience is defined by the actor's "definition of the situation" and unique configuration of role-identities. These enable persons to organize behaviour in a situation. Man, however, is seen as highly sensitive to shifting definitions of himself by others and constantly in need of identity confirmation from others. Everyday life is seen as a bargaining process, whereby people "legitimate" their many role-identities and stand ready to sacrifice any one of these in order to save the standing of self as a whole and whatever constitutes their core identity (McCall and Simmons, 1978:92).

There is not complete externality in McCall and

Simmons' analysis; the already-interpreted world is not just a series of role scripts from which the individual mirrors his own; role-identities are typically one's own. There is the biographical self referring back to the past with concrete views, images, attributes, standards, and feelings about his own person. There is both a continuity and stability as well as an openness to change and remodification in all phases of life.

The process of identity construction is seen by interactionists as continuous throughout one's life. Socialization is not an unfolding that leads to completeness at any stage. Berger and Luckman (1967) speak of primary and secondary socialization. In primary socialization, the child takes on the roles and attitudes of those around, learns a general culture as well as various sub-cultures. Primary socialization ends when the "generalized other" has been established and the individual is a functional member of society with a coherent sense of identity.

Secondary socialization is "the internalization of institutional-based sub-words" (Berger and Luckmann, 1967:138). Secondary socialization is viewed by Berger and Luckmann as "partial reality" in contrast to the "base-world" of primary socialization. Nevertheless, realities learned later are "cohesive realities characterized by normative and affective as well as cognitive components" (Berger and Luckmann, 1967:138).



Socialization, too, is seen as a continuous process in the sense that individuals continue to be socialized into many "sub-worlds", sub-cultures and different group affiliations. Primary socialization is viewed as very important because any socialization thereafter has to work on the realities learned in primary socialization. Rose (1962:19) speaks about the inability of people to "unlearn" some things. One's identity, cultural experience, personal values, and meanings are never entirely lost or forgotten, but they can be remodified or changed.

Musgrove (1977:23) emphasizes the fact that older theories of socialization stress the influence of earlier internalization. The child, in primary socialization, learns various perspectives. These perspectives are the potentials and capacities "an actor brings to the situation which determines the kind of meaningful responses in that situation" (Warshay, 1962:151). Perspectives serve as frames of reference making for "definition of situations". They are influenced by the culture and social class that one grows up in. The meanings one gives the world and one's orientations to and understandings of the world are related to the culture of the local community, including traditional beliefs and values, religious practices, ways of making a living and family structures. Those culturally defined patterns and meanings of life are part of the socio-historic conditions and are often taken for granted in

everyday life.

The system of stratification in a society or a culture is important because there is concern for the social environment of individuals as it relates to their development. Ways of viewing the world and one's place in it are learned in and through social environment. These views are the nub of one's identity in the world. Swift (1977:250-251) quotes Kohn (1963:471) regarding the usefulness of the concept of social class.

Social class has proven to be so useful a concept because it refers to more than simple educational level or occupation, or any of a large number of correlated variables. It is so useful because it captures the reality that the intricate interplay of all these variables creates different basic conditions of life at different levels of the social order. Members of different social classes, by virtue of enjoying (or suffering) different conditions of life come to see the world differently - to develop different conceptions of social reality, different aspirations and hopes and fears, different conceptions of the desirable.

Part of the social environment of individuals as it relates to everyday interaction is other people. Interactionists focus on the concept of significant others in the life of an individual. Mead (1934:152-164) emphasized the importance of significant others in moulding self and behaviour. The character of one's others has important consequences in the formation and maintenance of identity. That is if we accept that the self is formed in interaction and that interaction is in essence the relationship between self and others. As Hughes (1962:119) put it, "what others?"

The first significant others are ready-made by virtue of being born into a particular family. The attitudes and roles and world of the family are acquired by the child in early socialization. There are many others in the child's world and still more in the process of secondary socialization. Some are chosen, some are not. One cannot always choose his teachers or those with whom he works, but one can choose his friends. Others who have some influence on values and behaviours can come from books, television, or from groups in which one is not a member. However, that is more into reference group theory which is distinguished from the concept of significant others.

How are significant others distinguished? Berger (1977:19) postulates that the ongoing validation of an individual's social world and his identity in that world is upheld by "truly significant others" and in the process of reality maintenance it is possible to distinguish significant others from less important others. The nearness of social relationships, the degree in which they occur in face-to-face interaction, their strength and continuity, and to which they are credited significance by individuals are the basic determinants of others as significant. Berger (1974; 1977) also posits a very strong relationship between identity maintenance and identity change and the support and influence of one's significant others.

Musgrove (1977) in his study of identity change in adults in marginal situations questions the importance of significant others in the lives of those studied. He concludes, quite explicitly, that the importance of significant others in maintenance or transformation of self is exaggerated by social psychologists. In contrast, he points to the importance and endurance of what he terms the "historical self" (Musgrove, 1977:221). Certainly the degree of influence of significant others is problematic. There is also the difference in the socialization of children and adults.

How much of identity change is maturation or socialization is open and problematic as is the connection between primary and secondary socialization. The development of personal identities can be included in the list of problems. Socialization, maturation, development and change are linked and any precision in stating a relationship is almost impossible. Strauss (1959:89-90) examines the problem in a most cogent passage relating to the ideas of development and change:

Presumably it refers to a progressive movement wherein the beginning, middle and end bear some discernible relationships to each other. But the notion of development is a trap for the unwary and a battleground for some centuries of philosophic contention. Precisely what are the relationships that hold between the beginning, middle and end? This is the nub of the argument.

Sträuss (1959:91) views development as the "relationship between permanence and change" and conceptualizes it as "a series of related transformations". The idea of transformation is intended to capture "the open-ended, tentative, exploratory, problematic, devious, changeable, and only partly-unified character of human courses of action". For Sträuss, development is seen as "transformation". Obviously, identity does not mature in the same sense that a biological organism matures. Theories of maturation and socialization differ depending on the field and persuasion of these within that field from whence they are viewed. From the view of symbolic interactionism identity is seen as open and changeable, not formed and structured once and for all.

While one might not be prone to use words with such dramatic connotations as "transformations" to refer to man in everyday life there is no denial of change as a constant in human life and that identities are open to change. But in discussing change there are endless pitfalls. What precisely is changing? Musgrove (1977: 13-14) points to the possibility of significant changes in behaviour without corresponding changes in the values and meanings one gives the world and himself; values and meanings may change although behavioural changes are impossible. What is change, or what is real change?

Most people go through their lives in a remarkable routine and regular sort of fashion. Even though there are

migrations through many social worlds and the realization of many social identities, man makes sense of the world and his identities in different "worlds" in more or less rational terms through routines and regulated conduct. This does not imply that identities and interactions take place on a totally rational basis. In everyday life there are unconscious and irrational elements, but there is always some element of self-consciousness. That is the foundation of man in society.

For symbolic interactionists the manner in which identities enter everyday life is an essential part of any interactional encounter. Everyday life and interaction can be viewed in terms of identity-- the identities assumed, constructed and portrayed by individuals. In terms of the original question who am I?, we can posit many social identities that are a part of one's unique personal identity.

#### Identity, Schooling and Career

Children enter school, not as empty buckets but with already-present realities, perspectives and coherent identities formed in primary socialization. The way in which a student experiences school is influenced by factors outside school. That pupil perspectives and orientations to school vary with different groups has been pointed out by Woods (1979) and Hargreaves (1967). These groups tend to divide along socio-economic lines into pro and anti-schoolers, with the middle classes being pro-school and the

working classes being anti-school. Pro-schoolers are also linked to educational success with the upper streams being pro school. While this is a simplification of their work, the two broad groupings are seen to play an important part in orientation to school, and performance and behaviour in school and thereby the identities that are constructed in the school.

School, in our culture, is an important part of the secondary socialization process. Socialization into this "sub-world" includes having to learn new roles and vocabularies, new forms of conduct, new understandings and the routine procedures of the formal institution. These intra-school processes form part of the student's experience and the way in which a student relates to and deciphers school is critical in its identity implications for both current identity constructions and future identity developments.

While there might be certain overall similarities in perspectives, individuals are not necessarily constrained to think and act in the same manner. Student perspectives and identities are being constructed and modified in interaction in schools but in light of their personal biographies. For some students, school might validate old ways of thinking and believing, and help maintain present personal or social identities. For others, school might modify definitions of self and add new ways of looking at the world and themselves. Whatever the outcome of school for individual students, they are, during

their school career engaged in finding and being "who they are and who are about to become" (Woods, 19979:247). Finding the meaning of schooling experiences for students and the influence of these on student identities is the core of the symbolic interactionist approach to school.

Use of the concept of career provides a way of linking the pupil's experience of school with the identities that are related to that world. Two aspects of career must be viewed - objective and subjective. Traditionally, career has been viewed from the objective side and used to refer to the series or succession of related jobs, arranged in a hierarchy, through which persons moved in some orderly sequence (Woods, 1983:13). This aspect is better referred to as the career line of career pattern to distinguish it from other aspects. In schools, the career pattern is clearly and progressively constructed. The grades or levels can be viewed as the steps in the hierarchy. Completion of each is shown by a certificate gained by passing evaluative procedures, usually examinations. Individuals in the school system do not move through or progress at the same rate or in the same direction. How a particular student moves through the system can be referred to as the individual-objective career.

There are different types of careers in school that students can follow. Cicourel and Kituse (1977:114-121) in their study of adolescent careers in high school noted the variety of careers within the organization of the school-



academic career, delinquent career, and clinical career. Typing of students by school personnel, the assignment of social identities, was the basis for careers in these categories. For instance, if a student was classified as an "academic problem" he might have a career as a slow-learner and be placed in a special class. He would have a different career pattern because in special classes in schools the pattern is different from that of regular classes. The well delineated steps do not exist and students often remain in the same class for three or four years. The experiences they are exposed to and the curriculum assigned are different. So the way they move through the school is different from other students. Each individual-objective career in special class may be different from others in that class as well.

Pupil's objective careers in school are more noted for their channelling by outside forces than their own initiated direction (Woods, 1983:170). Cicourel and Kituse (1977) show that the students whom they studied were placed in various career lines by the organizational activities of school personnel, in particular that of guidance counsellors. Similarly, Woods (1979:59) shows that pupil choices of subject and occupational direction were heavily influenced by teacher ideas of "appropriate" career lines for students to follow.

In the objective sense of career, together with progressive steps, there are certain other stages of movement.

Students progress from primary to elementary school, from elementary to junior high and from there to senior high. Such stages of change can be characterized as status passages. Strauss (1959:108) sees the movement from status to status as setting "conditions for change and development of identities". These changes are psychological as well as social. At each stage, students must learn new patterns, ways of managing and solving problems, new ways of feeling and acting. Change is, of course, minimized by the regularity of such passages. They become a foreseen part of the student's career and there is preparation from previous stages. The direction and magnitude of such movement and the meaning it holds is again an individual definition.

Personal meanings and definitions bring us to the subjective side of careers. Goffman (1961:127) brings out the two-sidedness of the notion of career. He points out the association between the person's personal definition of events, means and identities and the objectively defined positions or uses in organizations. Stebbins (1970) clarifies Goffman's earlier definition and develops the subjective approach to career. One's subjective career is always linked with some social identity. It is defined as "the actor's recognition and interpretation of past and future events associated with a particular identity and especially his interpretation of the important contingencies as they were or will be encountered" (Stebbins, 1970:34). The value of using this approach lies in provision of a framework from

which to study the personal evaluation of the more objective facets of career line and individual-objective career.

Subjective career is likened to "predisposition", an acquired and enduring state which when activated, equips people with a specific view of world and acts as a guide for behaviour. In that sense, it is similar to perspective as defined above. Awareness of subjective career can be promoted by contingencies in that career line. Failing a grade in school would be apt to promote awareness and aid retrospection of what has happened and promote prospection about what will happen. In interpreting what has happened to them as students, whatever meanings are assigned are liable to influence actions and contemplation of lines of action. For instance, having failed a grade and remaining, unwillingly, in that grade could lead an individual to feel that his career as a student is not satisfactory. The prospect of leaving for some other career might be considered as a line of action. Equally, having to remain in a grade against his will might produce stress and strain as it grates against a positive concept of self in that situation. This could lead to a display of certain unacceptable social behaviours or have the psychological consequence of finding rationalizations to legitimate his social identity.

Exploration of a pupil's career from the subjective view captures the definitions one gives one's social identity and how that definition is reflected in personal identity.

ty. It could pinpoint specific situations and circumstances that bring out different meanings and situated identities. It could also demonstrate what are turning points for students. It brings out the values, goals, attitudes, habits and definitions in the personalized meanings that are given to one's career.

A study by Ashton and Field (1976) underlines the importance of the study of both the objective and subjective aspects of career. Although they do not employ career as a concept, their study involves both the subjective and objective sides of school and occupational careers of a group of young people. They highlight the concept of "perspectives" in terms of student attitudes, views of the world and interpretations of their experience. Their identities as students are shown to influence the direction of their occupational identities. Ashton and Field (1976) treat the subject at both an individual and societal level. Possibly, as Woods (1983:13), says, "subjective careers can offer a means of linking the individual's experience with the institutional provision of formal careers and society at large".

#### The Research Problem

The overriding problem in the present research is the issue of identity as revealed in pupils' own accounts. More specifically this research deals with the identities of senior special education students who are in what the school has labelled a Work Experience Class. Within the

structure of our schools the position occupied by special education students is low in the status hierarchy. By virtue of being in a special education group, students have a series of experiences that affect what they learn, how they learn and with whom they learn. Special Education allocates an identity to students so placed. That identity is real to those around them and is often taken into account by those labelled. While objective information is a necessary concern, as is more structural information regarding the processes which shape and determine the whole area, such information is only part of the picture. The subjective interpretation by students themselves is the other side. How students define themselves within their experience can only be elaborated by those involved. That is the focus of the present study.

The central concern within the overall problem of identity is the implication of schooling on pupil constructions of identity and the development of identity. More specifically, there are two parts to the central concern which have led to a number of explicit questions. The first part relates to pupils in school. As pupils relate their orientations to school, their views of teachers, subjects and other students, the terms in which they choose to respond and the categories they choose to talk about their experiences provide clues to their current self-definitions and perspectives. How students perceive the work experience class of which they are members and how they deal with this aspect have implications for their present and future identities. What is the meaning

of success for them? What are their relationships with significant others in their lives? Who are their friends? Student perceptions of the role of parents in schoolwork and ~~their views of parental aspirations for them~~ add to an understanding of the place of parents in their career and in identity formation and continuation.

The second side of the research problem deals with identity of work experience students in the transition from school to work. How are current identities related to past conceptions? The way these former students reflect on their schooling career, their likes and dislikes and their views of teachers are revealing about their identities as students as well as with current conceptions of themselves. The kind of beliefs they build up about the world and their place in it is reflected in the meanings given their move to the world of work. What constituted problems for them in making the transition? What types of occupational identities have these work experience students assumed? Whether they are satisfied or dissatisfied with their current life and what they want to do in the future indicates their conception of their identities in the world. How do their friends fit into the overall fabric of their lives as significant others?

Overall, this research is concerned with the consciousness of these young people, their observations, knowledge and reflections of the social world; the sense they make of their experience; and the terms in which they define themselves and their circumstances.

## CHAPTER 11

### THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The general aim of this research was furnished by my interest in a sociological orientation to the study of identities, my involvement in the area of special education and my particular concern for the work experience students whom I teach. This interest in the study of identities together with the concern for work experience students in school lead me to focus the present study on the identities of two groups of work experience students. The first group is composed of students who were in school in a work experience class at the time of this research. The second group is composed of members of a former work experience class who are now out of school.

The research presented here is, in one sense, that of the participant observation variety. At the time of this study the researcher was teaching one group who were in school and whose identities were being studied. The other group studied were previous students of the researcher as well. Undoubtedly, the researcher's observation and knowledge of these individuals influenced, in some way, the entire data collection and analysis processes.

In collecting data for this research both questionnaire and interview techniques were used. Prior to addressing data collection techniques and the process of

data analysis it is appropriate to give a description of the sample.

### Description of Sample

This section presents a background in terms of community, school, and special education classes as well as an account of the students and former students involved in the study.

### Community

A description of the area from which a school draws its student population affords useful information about the setting of the school, conveys impressions and adds to one's understanding about the world of the students outside school. There are six Newfoundland communities which are home to the students of this school. They range in size from 100 to 1200 inhabitants and are approximately five to ten kilometers apart. The population is predominately of the Roman Catholic faith with the church and church-related organizations playing a major role in many aspects of community life.

The area's location is not far distant from a larger city but it remains very much a rural area in its social, religious and economic activities. A small percentage of the population commute to the city for work, but these tend to be professional people who have moved from the city to rural areas to live. The main occupation of the majority



of people now, as in the past, revolve around the fishery. Independent fishermen who fish inshore from small boats make up part of the population. But the main employers are a number of fish-processing and packaging plants. Work is mainly seasonal and, at certain times of the year, the unemployment rate is approximately 30-40%. Unofficial ratings are higher, between 60 and 70%.

### School

This school was built in the early seventies, during the era of federal DREE grants. It is the only junior and senior high school for the six communities. In order to solve some of the problems surrounding its location, especially those of conflicts between communities, it was decided to build the school in the most central area. The student population is predominantly of the Roman Catholic faith and the school is under the jurisdiction of a Roman Catholic School Board. There are approximately 300 students in this school and all of them are bused daily to and from school. The teaching staff numbers 19 including the vice-principal and principal. The vast majority of the staff do not live in the communities but in the nearby city.

The school itself is divided into three wings. The junior wing houses grades 7, 8, and 9. Another wing holds levels I and II students, while level III students are

in the third, There is a cafeteria and gymnasium in the center of the wings. The school is not well accommodated, but it does have a French lab., science lab., library, home economics room, and a multi-purpose room. What these rooms contain in terms of materials is far from ideal.

There are two classes at each level and grade, but there is no streaming into particular homerooms based on academic ability. There are two special education classes, as well, the junior high special education and the senior high work experience. In junior high, there is one program offered for each grade but the nature of the extended high school leads to a number of programs. Despite the small size of the school, basic, academic, and advanced courses are offered in language, mathematics and science. In core subjects there are mainly mixed ability groups.

#### Special Education

The area of special education has acquired legitimacy in school systems as well as separate from them. Recent striving for "normalization" of individuals with physical or mental handicaps parallels a strongly voiced concern about the ethics of diagnostic labelling and the use of classification systems. But many schools continue to categorize and differentiate. Added to that, within the formal education system, the parameters of special education have increased to include students whose "specialness" is

not obvious and whose deviation from the "normal" is open to question. The process by which students come to be identified, defined and classed as special education is indeed problematic. Nevertheless, special education classes are seen as an appropriate educational model for certain students. As pointed out previously, the school where the present research took place has two groups of special education classes, one junior class and one senior class. Each class has approximately ten to thirteen students.

The research reported in the ensuing chapters was conducted with two different groups of students in the senior special education program, called work experience. Both of the groups are described separately in the following sections. The first group described is the group whom the researcher was teaching at the time of the present research. They are referred to as in-school students. The second group described is made up of those whom the researcher had taught one to two years previously in the work experience program in the same school. They are referred to as out-of-school students.

#### In-School Students

The class consists of eleven students who are known in school by both staff and students as the Work Experience Class. None of the students in this group is classified as mentally retarded, nor are there physical abnormalities that

set them apart from other students. Rather, they are labelled as "slow-learners", "reading problems", "emotional problems" or as "disadvantaged" and "deprived". Being labelled and classified is a prerequisite for entrance into the class.

The class name, that is, Work Experience, is a function of the programming followed - a combination of work and school. One day a week is spent "on the job" at a particular placement in the community while the remaining four days are spent in school. The type and location of work is a decision made by both student and teacher in line with availability of participating employers. The in-school schedule and course work followed by each pupil is individualized as well. All pupils are integrated with regular classes for a number of high school credit courses, but as this is on an individual basis, each student follows a number of different subjects, at different times in different classes.

Of the eleven students, four have been in the work experience class for three years. These will be referred to in the following chapters as third-year or third-level students. The programming followed by the third year students is different from others in the group as they are not involved in the "on the job" aspect. They had been taking part for the previous two years, but, at the time of

present research, were concentrating solely on academic subjects. All the third year students have a number of credits in the extended high school program and they are currently taking on 11 to 14 credits in second and third level courses.

The remaining seven students will be referred to as first-year or first-level students as this is their first year in the work experience class. All of these participate in work placements outside the school. They can be divided into two groups based on the number of credit courses for which they are registered. Three students are registered for 12 courses, while the other four are taking a fewer number.

The members of the group have entered the work experience class from different locations within the school system. Four students have spent most of their school career in special education classes and entered the senior class from junior special education class. Two of these are third-level, two are first-level. The majority of others were recommended from grades 8 and 9, while one girl was admitted from level 1 of the regular high school program. The age and gender of the group are shown in Table 1.

There is similarity in the home backgrounds of these students. Their parents have a similar cultural

TABLE 1  
AGE AND GENDER OF IN-SCHOOL STUDENTS

	Age (years)					Totals
	15	16	17	18	19	
Gender	(N)					
Male	2		2	1		5
Female		3	2		1	6
Totals	2	3	4	1	1	11

background. They have all been born in the communities in which they now live or have moved from similar communities along the same stretch of coast. Their home religious denomination is Roman Catholic. The level of formal education of parents of these students is similar in that very few have completed high school and none have post-secondary education. The socio-economic status of parents varies. Three of the families are maintained on

social assistance and four other fathers have unskilled temporary jobs while two other families operate their own businesses and two fathers have semi-skilled permanent jobs. Six mothers of these in-school students work outside the home. Two are involved in the family business while the others have unskilled full or part-time positions. The eleven in-school students represent eleven different families. The number of children in these families range from 2 to 11. The specific breakdown of the number of families with different numbers of children is presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2  
SIZE OF FAMILY OF ORIGIN OF IN-SCHOOL STUDENTS

<u>Number of Families</u>	<u>Number of Children in Families</u>
1	2
1	4
1	5
1	6
3	7
1	8
1	9
<u>2</u>	11
<u>Total 11 Families</u>	

### Out-of-School Students

The description of this group of out-of-school students focuses on demographic and background information, as their present life forms part of the information discussed in Chapter 4. This group was composed of seven young men and one young woman who have been out of school between one and two years. One other young lady who had been a member of the work experience class with this group could not be contacted, as she had left the area. Those who were interviewed still live in their home communities with their parents. The age and gender of this group are shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3

#### AGE AND GENDER OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL STUDENTS

	Age (Years)				Totals
	17	18	19	20	
Gender	(N)				
Male		4	2	1	7
Female	1				1
Totals	1	4	2	1	8



As with the previous group, the out-of-school students have no severe physical or mental abnormalities that would differentiate them from others. Some of this group had spent one year in the work experience class, others one and a half to two years, while one boy had remained for three years. Half of the group had entered work experience from the junior special education class. Three had been recommended from grade 9, and the only girl, from grade 7.

When these former students were in the work experience program they followed the basic pattern that has been described above for the in-school students. They took part in a number of job placements and their academic work was an individualized combination of credit and non-credit courses. At the time of leaving, one boy had accumulated twenty credit courses (roughly equivalent to grade 11 or level 2) while another had only four credits. The majority were in the middle of these two extremes.

The parental backgrounds of these former students are similar to that described for the in-school group. The families are of the Roman Catholic denomination and have spent most, if not all, of their lives in their home communities. Educational backgrounds of their parents are similar, with one parent having completed high school and none having attended any post secondary institution. The economic status of the families varies. One family has its

own business, one other father has a full-time position at unskilled work; three fathers have temporary work, two have retired, while one family lives on social assistance. Of the mothers, five work outside the home at unskilled types of jobs. Family size also varies (Table 4) and the members of this group tend to be the youngest or close to the youngest of the children in these families.

TABLE 4  
SIZE OF THE FAMILY OF ORIGIN OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL STUDENTS

<u>Number of Families</u>	<u>Number of Children in Family</u>
2	4
2	5
1	6
1	12
2	14
Total 8 Families	

#### Data Collection

Following the methods of symbolic interactionism, the basic aim in collecting data was to "get at" members own

accounts of their experiences as the meanings and definitions one holds are inextricably linked with the attitudes and views one holds of oneself and of the world. The process of data collection was divided into two separate stages - questionnaire and interview stages - with two separate groups of work experience students - in-school and out-of-school students. The process of data collection with each of these groups will be described separately. The first section describes data collection with the in-school students; the second section deals with the out-of-school students. Following that, a note on questionnaire and interview methods will be given.

#### In-School Students

Research with this group was carried out over a period of five weeks in the school setting. Data were collected from each student in two forms - questionnaires and taped interviews. Three different questionnaires were used, each administered at different times. The first questionnaire related to demographic information about the student and information on family background. Questions were stated to obtain information on age, gender, parental occupations, parental education, number of children in the family, and their educational background (Appendix A). A second questionnaire revolved around views of the work experience class, subjects, orientation to school and fail-

ure in school. A sample of questions includes: Why do you think you are in the work experience class? What subjects do you like in school? Overall, do you like or dislike school? Explain why or why not (Appendix B). The final questionnaire called for a response to how these students felt certain others in their lives viewed them. To elicit this view, the questionnaire was phrased as follows: My mother thinks I am \_\_\_\_\_ (Appendix C).

Interviews lasting from thirty to fifty minutes were taped-recorded. These interviews were lightly structured and were carried out in the school setting. Students were invited to talk about their schooling experiences, past and present. Guideline questions, per se, were not used but certain categories were referred to. These general areas were school, teachers, parents, friends, activities and future plans.

#### Out-of-School Students

The data collected from this group took two forms - questionnaires and informal interviews. Two questionnaires were administered in the school setting. The first related to demographic information about the members of the group and facts on their family background (Appendix A). The second contained questions relating to work and feelings about work, such as: Are you happy with the work you are doing? What else would you like to do? Views of school and

teachers, such as: How did you feel about your teachers in school?; their relationship with friends and parents, such as: What activities do you and your friends do together?; about problems experienced since leaving school (Appendix D).

Short, informal interviews were held with most of these former students individually, and with them as a group. I decided against tape recorded sessions because I felt that this group would not be as open and forthright with the use of a tape recorder as they would be without it. The interviews centered around topics relating to their life at that time - the sorts of things that were going on in the community, the kinds of things they were doing, availability of work, community events and what they would like to do.

#### Questionnaire and Interview Techniques

Given the existence of a student-teacher relationship of some nature, I was very conscious during the data collection to influence students response as little as possible. Prior to starting the actual collection I had spent some time discussing the research with the students. I explained my involvement as part of a university program, discussed their involvement and answered questions they had. Casting myself in the role of researcher gave some distance to my teacher role - both for myself and for the students. The students in the school were very responsive, interested

and eager to get on with the project. Those out of school were also very willing. Together with my efforts to put the students at ease, their own general nature aided communication. These students and former students are not closed and secretive, rather they are open and even anxious to give their point of view. Chats and discussion had also been a routine part of classroom proceedings.

Taylor and Bogan (1984:94) discuss the importance of being nonjudgemental while interviewing. Woods (1983:17) uses the word "sympathetic" to describe the interviewing process, but he does not elaborate the meaning. However, common sense, as well, tells one that others are more open if one refrains from making negative comments, putting people down, or judging harshly what they say. Appreciation of another's point of view goes a long way in interviewing (as well as in teaching). The process of coaching during interviews can also be a problem because the interviewee may be led into giving interpretations more in line with those of the interviewer than would otherwise be the case.

Use of the tape recorder tended to make some students self-conscious and less talkative than usual. They did however loosen up after a while. The questionnaire presented no difficulty, though writing is not the forte of many of these students. I gave assistance whenever I saw it was needed or whenever it was asked for.

### Data Analysis

In attempting to get at the subjective realities of students and in dealing with qualitative data, one becomes cognizant that there is a danger of superimposing one's presuppositions or preconceptions to the data that are received. While it is impossible to rid oneself of one's values, the interpretation of data should be as unfocused as possible. In line with the aim of research, which itself may be shaped by personal preferences, the actual collection and analysis go hand-in-hand, and analysis should remain faithful to these groups' accounts.

Becker and Greer (1970:138) noted that people see the world through distorting lenses and we must not uncritically accept the factual validity of what they say. But the truth per se is not the objective of this research. Recognizing that people might give differing accounts to different audiences in different contexts, or exaggerate successes and downplay failures, I have no reason to believe that the students interviewed did not give what they believed and felt to be an honest rendering of how they view themselves and their experiences.

The data collected in this study of work experience students were studied with the aim of pinpointing patterns with respect to similarities and differences in the experiences of the present work experience students and the recollections which former students have of their schooling

experience. The approach is directed toward understanding those under study, their perspectives on their own lives, their experiences and situations as expressed in their own words. Insights and concepts from identity theory are used when they "fit" the data themselves. This is in line with the grounded theory method of Glaser and Strauss (1967). Theoretical concepts are sensitizing concepts in the sense that they provide "a general sense of reference and suggest directions along which to look" (Blumer, 1969:148). These concepts are used to illuminate and explain behaviours.

Obviously, all data are not self-explanatory, and students do not interpret their feelings and actions within a sociological framework. Denzin (1970) maintains a distinction between everyday and scientific conceptions of reality. He maintains that sociological explorations should be shaped from meanings given by the user, but must also be placed in a sociological perspective. In the process of interpreting the data there are some links between individual behaviour and meaning and broader structural conceptions. As Denzin (1970:10) points out "we must simultaneously link man's symbols and conceptions of self with the special circles and relationships that furnish him with those symbols and conceptions". The following report contains certain theoretical concepts relating to identity, and they are used to guide the interpretation and presentation of data. Attention is given to meaning and the



function of meaning in developing and maintaining a sensible world. More specifically with reference to identity of work experience students the present analysis focuses on the meanings and interpretations given by some students to their school careers, and the meanings and interpretations given by others to their occupational careers. The social identities, personal identities, and perspectives that are constructed, maintained or changed in the social context become evident in the terms that students choose to talk about themselves and their experiences. The significance of certain status passages for their identities and their careers was referred to. In keeping with what furnishes and sustains meanings and perspectives, their relationship with significant others in their world is explored. The interpretations in the following chapters are illustrated with verbatim comments of those participating in the study. Chapter 3 presents the views and identities of in-school students' responses and Chapter 4 deals with those of out-of-school students.

## CHAPTER 111

### IDENTITIES OF WORK EXPERIENCE STUDENTS

This chapter is based on the understandings and interpretations of the in-school students of this study. Within this group there are shared cultural definitions and institutional meanings. However, the interpretations that each student assigns to experience, the meaning given to circumstances, and the sense-made of situations is typically a student's own from a personal perspective. The views of each student reflect not only current identities, but also past identities and future projections. Specifically, the chapter focuses on "the development, maintenance, and projection of a desired image of self" (Woods, 1983). This is viewed in relation to the students' general orientation to school, and more particularly to their identification with the work experience group, together with their reflections about significant others in their lives.

#### Orientation to School

Students' feelings about school are subject to change as situations change and as individual meanings and intentions change. However, students at any particular time will have a general orientation to school in terms of a positive or negative outlook. Such indications that

students give to their schooling demand attention because the nature of these orientations influence their actions, plans of action, and their achievement. In any given situation (Martin, 1985). Of equal importance is that student identities are linked with these orientations. Their views about school reflect, if only implicitly, identities that are assigned to them and those they construct for themselves as students.

The following analysis of pupil orientations to school includes general attitudes in terms of like or dislike, reasons for staying in school, views on subjects and teachers, as well as interpretations of failure.

#### Attitudes Toward School

Most students responded positively when asked whether or not they currently liked school. Some students cited broad, educational in-school factors as their reason for liking school. One 18 year old boy claimed that school gave him the opportunity "to learn something new every day". Another, a 17 year old, expressed the belief that school "gives you an education and shows you how people live without education". One other 17 year old boy did not elaborate his reasons, but simply "likes" school "because it is enjoyable". A 17 year old girl listed more specific environmental, social and educational reasons for her positive feeling.

I like school because I like the surroundings, my friends are here and the subjects are interesting. I can't find anything wrong with school.

Other students who also professed to like school compared what they do in school to what they would do if they were out of school, and for them "school passes away the day". One 17 year old girl viewed school as a relief from the monotony of doing nothing. She wrote, "if I was home, I'd be in bed all day. It is something to do". Another 16 year old girl in the same vein, explained that "if you were home, you would be bored".

A combined feeling of like and dislike was the sentiment expressed by one 19 year old girl who has more than the usual number of family problems, responsibilities and conflicting demands on her time. She explained her feeling thus:

I don't like school sometimes because sometimes school is hard for me to get to study and you can't get through school unless you study. I like it sometimes because you can have fun and meet people from different places.

Only one student, a 15 year old girl, stated an overall dislike for school. She added, however, a concern about her future identity, "I guess I have to (stay) if I want a good future".

Students were also asked to recall their attitudes toward school in the past. As they defined themselves in their past experiences, and interpreted what had happened to

them, they were elaborating their subjective career as students. There were similarities of perspective, feelings and meanings in their subjective careers. In their discussions of previous school years many students revealed cycles of like and dislike and stages when they "felt like dropping out". Illustrating this cyclical pattern of like, dislike and desire to leave was the observation of one 18 year old third level boy whose earlier experience obviously had a lasting impression and remained embedded in his identity through his school career. He described his previous school years as generally "alright" except for one particular year when he had to remain in the elementary school in grade 6. While he had not actually failed that year, the junior high special education (for which he had been recommended) had too many students, so the school would not accept him. He described being "fed up" and "not wanting to return to school that year". The entire year was a "bad" year and one during which he "did not get along with the teachers either". He went on to explain that once he "got into high school" he felt "better" and has "liked school since then". Other students related similar feelings that they had had at one time or another in their school career that stemmed from similar situations. One 17 year old boy talked about "hating school in grade 7" and not wanting "to come back that year" but he "feels better now". Another 15 year old boy "used to feel like quitting. I was fed up in grade 8".

There are a few students who claimed they had always liked school. They related incidents or situations about which they had "felt bad" but those feelings passed and did not colour their general orientation to school.

Such references indicate an awareness of their career at that time. This awareness was related, in many instances, to status passages and social identity assignments that grated against their self-image. The identities assigned to them and their image of themselves in various situations played a role in their attitudes toward school and their plans of action. An unwanted identity assignment was alluded to by the boy who had had to remain in elementary school an extra year. He related that he felt he had been "treated like a baby". Evidently this social identity grated against his own sense of identity, as he went on to reveal that he felt "much better" when he entered high school where he was treated in a "much more grown-up" manner.

The movement from elementary school to junior high was important for the boy mentioned above in terms of identity and esteem. Other students, in relating their feelings about school, also brought out the significance that this move had for them. In Chapter I, the movement from elementary to junior high and from junior high to senior high is referred to as status passage in the career line. The accompanying changes in the role of students, in treatment of students and demands on them as well as

perceived identity changes set the stage for a reversal in attitude and a conception of new lines of action for some students. One 16 year old girl, who was recommended to the work experience class from grade 9 explained that the move from junior high to senior high (even though it is the same building) had stimulated her "to work harder". She expressed her desire "to stay and finish school now".

Movement from junior special education to senior work experience is a status passage for students in a similar sense, to movement from junior to senior high. Here the timetables and prerequisites are not consensually shared or objectively set down, but students interpret for themselves. One third level, 17 year old boy, spoke of his awareness spending "too long in junior special education". He went on to explain his interpretation that he should have moved to work experience a year before he did. His new identity as a student who is "doing more subjects and things now" is an important part of his present positive self-conception. He has completed a number of high school credit courses. Another first level, 15 year old boy expressed the same idea, "too long in the junior class".

The connection between status passages, identity construction and maintenance of positive self-conception is clearly illustrated in the views of the students interviewed. These students were very conscious of moving or progressing through various stages. The movement was seen as an attainment, a new identity, that could be presented

to others and increase their self-esteem. Those whose desired image was at another level were very aware of their location within the system. Students become more conscious of their position when regularized movement is denied them. (This topic is discussed later in the Chapter). At this point it is sufficient to note that while most students indicated their desire for regularized movement and its importance for their identities one 16 year old girl gave a slightly different version. She brought out another type of time element in her realistic bordering-on-cynical observation: "at first everything seemed different - but it's all really the same. There's more freedom in high school and a variety of teachers, that's all".

#### Reasons for Staying in School

When students were asked to respond to the question of why they remained in school, most of them stated that their goal in school was "to get an education". Many went on to equate getting an education with ability to later obtain a job. Some of them observed:

To get a good education, to get a job.  
(17 year old girl)

I am in school to get an education where  
I can get a job.  
(17 year old boy)



I am in school to get experience for the future.

(16 year old girl)

I am in school to get an education and get out of school and then wait a couple of years and go to Montreal and see if I can play hockey.

(15 year old boy)

To get an education to get a job.

(19 year old girl).

It is difficult to interpret from their comments whether these pupils view the credential aspect of formal education as a necessity in finding a job, or whether to them "education" is actually job preparation.

Two students stated reasons that related to parental decision and preference. One of these, a 16 year old girl whose view of school was "not too bad" added that she was forced to go. In her words "my mother won't let me quit". Another 16 year old girl who observed that the move to high school had prompted her to work harder and while she would "like to get an education" her "father would like her" to go. One third level 18 year old boy reported a different reason; he is staying in school "because there is no work in the community".

#### Perception of Subjects

Woods (1979) found that different groups of students

in school chose subjects for different reasons. Dividing subject choice into effective and instrumental categories, he found that the non-exam group tended to choose subjects for their intrinsic interest, physical pleasure, social benefits and other such reasons, while exam forms tended to choose subjects for career-oriented reasons. In the present study, work experience students were asked about subject likes and dislikes. While the idea of subject choice does not apply to these students because of the nature of the program, the reasons referred to by students for liking or disliking particular subjects were similar to the non-exam group in Wood's research.

It is interesting to note that there was not much similarity in the subjects that students liked. Health, science, and mathematics were mentioned more often than others in this regard. "Easy to do", "not too hard", and "does well in it" were often cited as reasons for liking a subject. Students also mentioned "interesting" or "fun" in relation to subject likes. Elements intrinsic to the subject were sometimes stated. For example, health was seen as being of value and liked by one 18 year old girl because "you can learn a lot about what you should do and about your body". In theatre arts, according to another 17 year old girl, "you can really let yourself go". Conditions under which subjects were taught were significant for one 18 year old boy who related that there was "only a few in class and

you can get extra help". Only one student mentioned teachers in relation to liking a subject. A 17 year old girl liked a particular subject because "the teacher gives you lots of (written) work to do".

When students mentioned the subjects they did not like, they frequently indicated that these were "hard", "difficult" or required "too much study". Some students referred to disliking a particular subject because they "don't understand it". For example, one 19 year old girl expressed her inability to "never get it right in my head - always forgets it". Other favourite expressions to describe disliked subjects were "boring", "tangly", "stupid" and "gets on my nerves". As with their subject likes, there was not much similarity in their subject dislikes. English and literature were the subjects most frequently on the list of dislikes.

Students were also asked whether they had liked or disliked these same subjects throughout their school career. Many stated that they had "always" disliked certain subjects. Dislike of a subject was often associated with their experience of "difficulty" in that particular subject. In the words of one 15 year old girl who disliked mathematics "it was hard for me to do". Other students claimed to have "always" liked a particular subject. Again, liking of a subject was related to "doing well" or "passing" it". The cause and effect relationship between liking a

subject and doing well in that subject is open to question. Do students do well in subjects that they like or do they like subjects they do well in?

With some students, particular subjects have become an entrenched part of their academic identity. This association plays a role in the students' performance in that subject, in other subjects, in their plans of action and in their orientation to school. To illustrate: one third level 18 year old boy defined himself as "a poor reader". He made reference to all the problems he experienced since he had started school and related them to reading, which he felt he just "couldn't do". Another level three 17 year old boy, perceived himself as "real good in math", he had always liked that subject and intends to complete as many courses as he can. One third level, 19 year old girl, declared her hatred for history; she has "always hated it". She is taking a history course at present because it is required for graduation, but she stated the possibility that she will fail and will hate having to do it again. These students' views of their abilities or inabilities, their associated subject likes and dislikes along with the academic identities taken for themselves can have a very real effect on their objective careers in the school as well as their subjective careers.

As students' perceptions of themselves as "poor" in subjects and the related likes and dislikes become part of

their meaning structure, one would think their commitment to an investment in schoolwork in terms of time, study and effort would suffer. However, when the students in this group were asked if they worked hard in all subjects, most responded positively. They felt they "tried hard" to do the school work expected of them. The meanings and definitions applied to "working hard" varied. For one 17 year old first level girl it meant "two hours study every night". For another 15 year old, first level boy "a bit of study for an exam" was his definition. Another third level boy felt that he "tries hard" but study was "hard for him" as he "did not know how to study". Others expressed the belief that they tried hard at schoolwork but commitment to work in school was often negated by other feelings, as one 17 year old boy observed "sometimes I just don't feel like doing anything".

The influence of others' opinions on student perceptions of their academic ability was brought out by one 15 year old first level girl, who reported that she did "not work hard" and "everyone says I can do better". When asked if she felt she could achieve more, her evaluation was similar to others evaluation of her. She replied, "yea, I can". But achieving academically was not an overriding concern of hers because "sometimes schoolwork matters, sometimes it doesn't".

#### Perceptions of Teachers

Working hard or being perceived by others to work

hard in school was considered by these students to be an important factor in teacher attitudes and behaviours towards them. Most students expressed the opinion that teachers will give "extra help" if a student is perceived as a hard worker. One third level boy figured that if you needed "a mark to pass", teachers would "give you a few marks" if they perceived them to be working hard. Another first level girl, taking the role of the teacher and showing empathy, went on to explain that teachers feel "down" when they have to nag students about work. These pupils do not seem to doubt that being perceived as a "hard worker" is a significant factor in teacher actions and attitudes toward them.

When asked about their relationship with teachers these students perceived that this aspect was "pretty good" or "okay". They felt that generally they "got along all right" and "pretty well" with their teachers. Students also explained the kinds of behaviour and actions that were indicators of "getting along" with teacher. Communicating on a personal level outside the classroom was viewed as an important aspect by students. The fact that "you can fool around with them (teachers)" and "have a bit of fun" is seen as an interplay that indicates a good relationship. As well, when teachers "listen to you", "talk to you" and "help you" these teachers are seen as "liking you". One 16 year old girl alluded to a playing-the-game approach and from her point of view "if you get along with them, they're alright."

While most students generally perceived their teachers as being "okay" and they "got along" fairly well with most, some students indicated dislikes associated with particular teachers. These dislikes related to the bureaucratic types of behaviour that these teachers portray.

Students commented that some teachers are "too crooked", "they won't let you do anything", "they won't let you go to the bathroom". One first level girl verbalized her dislike of a teacher who "gets on" students' "nerves" and "drives" them "nuts". This teacher is seen to be "always on their backs" and to be "too strict".

Other types of teacher behaviour mentioned negatively by students was the sort that threatened the students' very identity and self-esteem. One first level girl, in relating her dislike of one teacher exclaimed that "every time I asked him a question he just ignored me". Another first level boy explained that one of his teachers, when he misbehaved, kept telling him "I don't have to keep you in my class". This kind of comment mystified the student and made him feel different from others in a negative fashion. The student disliked that teacher and wished "she wouldn't say that".

While most students disliked some aspects of teacher behaviours, a few students did not see "anything wrong" at all. Their observations indicate an acceptance of school discipline and rules and teachers' actions as enforcers.

This indicates something about their beliefs and perspectives as well. One third level boy declared that "teachers are fine. It's all the students' fault. They get what they deserve". Another first level boy felt that teachers are "generally not too strict. They sing out when they have to". Whether these boys had been on the receiving end of the "getting what they deserve" and the "singing out" is not obvious.

### Interpretations of Failure

A lock-step grade system has become firmly established as part of Newfoundland's educational process. Movement through the steps of the educational ladder is part of the objective career line for students. Although levels have replaced grades in high schools and students no longer have to repeat levels, the underlying idea remains the same - some students fail courses, some students do not. More than half the students in the present work experience class have been through the grade system in primary, elementary, and junior high school. Others have gone through primary and elementary only, while two students have been in special education classes since primary school. For those who have gone through the regular system, their objective academic career have been a series of failures and repetitions. What was stated about status passages refers to grades as well, having to remain unwillingly in a grade sets conditions for



change and new constructions of identities, attitudes and behaviours. However, it is not the objective definitions given to failure or attitude change that are important here, but rather the meanings that these students have given to failing, their reactions to it and the consequences for their identities.

Most students reported that they had failed a number of grades. Some described how they had felt at the time they failed by using such words as "sad", "down" and "bad". One 17 year old girl, who had failed in primary school, a number of times in junior high and most of the courses in level I of high school, expressed her perception of herself as "right stupid". Another 17 year old boy who had failed grades in primary school, grade seven twice, grade eight as well, promoted to grade nine and then failed grade nine, said that he had felt "very unhappy" and "not good about myself". Some other students had assumed a more nonchalant attitude when they had failed. One 16 year old girl, who failed three grades in junior high admitted that "she really didn't care". Another girl who had repeatedly failed grades seven and eight explained that "it really didn't bother me". Two boys also reported that they didn't "feel bad" and "didn't care".

Those students who stated they had "felt bad" when they failed disclosed that their reasons related to their

friends, who were going to the next grade while they were not. One boy stated that his "bad" feeling was because "if I had passed I'd be in grade 12 now". Both the students who "felt bad" and those who "didn't care" reported differences in their orientation to school. Having failed, they did not want to return the next year. It seems obvious that no one has a desired image of "being a failure". Maintaining a positive image of oneself is at the core of one's identity in the world. Of course, failing some grades in school is not equivalent to being a failure. Nevertheless, when objectively defined criteria inform students that they are failures in school and they are seen as failures by others, they must find some way to legitimate themselves and preserve their self-image. For many, their initial reaction was to opt out of the situation. Many wanted to leave school, "to quit" - to get out of the negative context in which they were cast.

However, quitting was not an option for most students, and with no choice but to remain in the situation they found other ways to protect their self-image. One was the meaning given for failure. Most students attributed their failure in various grades to lack of study, lack of hard work and lack of trying. Their academic ability or lack of it was not questioned as an explanation by these students. Lack of study is justifiable even desirable, but

lack of ability is not. For others, their preferred identity is outside school; so school and its happenings do not have the power to touch them. This may be seen as similar to the process of alienating oneself. For example, one 16 year old girl, who said that she had felt "out of place" when she failed, but she "got used to it" and "it doesn't matter"; "she really didn't care". For her, the identity she wishes does not relate to school. She is in school because her mother exerts some influence and will not permit her to leave.

In certain areas and for some students failure is not an identity issue. One 18 year old boy who identifies himself as a "poor reader" admitted that he "would like to be better in school". However, he does not see himself as a failure. Various negative self-labels are accommodated within meaning structures or new meaning structures are created to cope with discrepancies. Students can become committed to certain goals and values that seemingly conflict with other images of themselves. The 18 year old mentioned above wants to stay in school and complete enough credits to gain entry into vocational school. Of course, he has had some degree of success in completing high school credits, which probably alleviates some of the years of failures. Other students in this study, have also become committed to similar academic pursuits despite years of failure and being in a work experience program. This aspect

is discussed later in this chapter.

While student reaction to failure varied in terms of meanings, feelings and ways of coping, there was some effect on student orientations to school at that time as well as their feelings about themselves. Conditions might have been set for change but the changes for most students were not long lasting. Students found ways to digest their negative situated identities and to maintain an acceptable image of themselves. There is no indication that these students view themselves consistently as failures or feel "bad" about themselves.

#### Identification with the Work Experience Group

The comments of students regarding their participation in the work experience class raised the importance of certain issues relating to their identification with this environment. They have opinions on why they were placed in this group. They also have specific likes and dislikes about the group. Having to participate in this group also raises the issue of differences in this group and other grades and "normal" groups in the school. Relating to this is the question of how they perceive others to be viewing them. Their future projections and identities are also of concern as they are intertwined with meanings given to the work experience class and to school in general.

### Views about Work Experience

Students were asked their interpretations of the reasons why they were in work experience. They expressed their opinions in two major categories. Most students felt that they were placed in the work experience class so that they could get the necessary training for the job market. For one 17 year old student the work experience was designed to give him "experience for an occupation". The class name and the fact that most of these students participate in jobs in the communities as part of their program provided ready-made reasons for these students to see themselves as preparing for a job. Two students expressed their opinions:

When we go to work we are getting experience,  
then when we get out of school, we might get  
a job easier.

(15 year old boy)

I think I am in the work experience class be-  
cause I can get experience learning for a job.

(15 year old girl)

This aspect fits in with their perception of school as a place to learn and to prepare them for jobs. These ideas are part of the verbal and presentational rhetoric of the school to legitimate special education classes and create a favourable impression for students and parents and teachers.

For some students placement in the work experience group was processed and viewed in terms of their academic

identities and their ability to learn. They referred to themselves as "slow learners" and "slow workers". One 18 year old boy stated the feeling that he was "not able to get in regular class" and keep up with the academic expectations of these classes.

When students were questioned about their attitudes toward being in the work experience class, they all professed to like being in the class; however, the circumstances surrounding liking the class varied. There were differences in first level student opinions based on whether they had entered the class from a regular grade or from junior high special education.

Students in the third level of the program tended to mention conditions such as "small class" size and "extra help" more frequently than others. The small class was interpreted and portrayed by them as a place where "the teacher will have more time for you than a regular class to help and example things to you". In contrast when small class size was mentioned by those in the first level, it was liked for being less rigid, a place where "you can talk to each other in the mornings before the bell rings". Differences of interpretation might be explained by the fact that the students in third level are concentrating on academic course work and not taking part in the work placements. Getting extra help with course work was seen by

them as an important factor in passing examinations.

"Going to work" was an important aspect of the work experience class for many first level students. For some who had come in from junior high special education, the work day was "a break every Thursday". To other first level students coming from grade 9, the work placement day was an opportunity "to meet new people and (see) their lifestyles" as well as a chance to experience "the world from the workers' viewpoint".

Students also discussed what they disliked about the work experience class. While the majority of students enjoyed the work day, to a few it was "the thing I least enjoy" - it was the day "you have to get up early in the morning to be at work on time". Many of their dislikes about work experience were similar to their dislikes of school in general. Some felt that certain classes were "boring" and "teachers are sometimes crabby", while another felt that "having to do culture" (a subject) was "dreadful". One boy mentioned his inability to "be with my friends in regular class" as the aspect of being in work experience that he disliked. This was the only reference made by students themselves to the distinction between special and regular classes. Since this idea came up in other contexts and was raised by other students, it is clearly significant to them and will be discussed in a later section.

### Differences and Identity

When asked if they felt different from other students in the school only two of the students responded with a "yes". One 16 year old girl who entered work experience from grade 8 replied that she felt "different than other students because we have special classes". Another girl, 16, from grade 9 also felt different, but that difference was expressed in a positive vein, as she felt that other students "do not have such an opportunity".

Most students observed that they felt no different. Some proceeded to explain by pointing out similarities between work experience and other groups. To elaborate, one 15 year old boy could not see any difference "because they all come here to learn too". Another 17 year old, third level, boy felt that the other groups "are the same as us". Still other students, while explaining that they felt no different than any other students, pointed out differences. One 18 year old, third level, boy explained that he was simply "in this class to get extra help". Another 15 year old, first level boy said that he wasn't any different "because we just go out to work every Thursday".

Generally, the differences alluded to were downplayed. The implication seems to be that any differences that exist are relatively unimportant in the overall view of things from their perspective. This idea was carried through in their perceptions of others' views.



of them. When these students were asked if teachers treated them differently or said anything to indicate they saw them as different, they invariably answered "no". To them there was nothing that would indicate that teachers thought anything different about them than other students. The members of this group stated, as well, that other students did not make any negative comments to them about being members of the work experience class. Some students added that "good things" were said "particularly about the work placements". Yet, in seeming contradiction to what was professed, a few students said that they had overheard comments by different students to other members of the work experience class. These comments included phrases like "backward" and "stupid". The students who had overheard, assigned contexts and motives to the remarks. These comments included phrases like, "they were fighting", "they didn't mean it" and "they were kidding around".

When students were asked how they felt about other students and how they related to them most students felt they related well to others in school, and that most students were "friendly". One 18 year old, third level, girl reflected that "all students communicate and talk to each other. There is no snobbery". Other students indicated their realization of social divisions in the school. One 16 year old, first level girl, expressed a dislike of "some" and referred to "the way they gets on".

She added, "They acts as if there's no one good enough for them". Another 16 year old, first level, girl felt "accepted" by most students, but recognized "a bunch who ignore you".

The idea of feeling different and feeling that one is seen as different by others is important from the point of view of student identity. Differentiation in one sense is the essence of personal identity. In that regard, being seen as different in a positive way creates a kind of special identity. On the other hand, when people are removed from the "normal" in a negative fashion, they tend to reject that image and strive to be like others. Being members of the work experience group confers negative identities on those students who are involved and it is obvious that the students in this study are aware of this. The emphasis by these students was on minimizing differences and pointing out similarities between themselves and others. While it might be a reality that teachers and other students do not treat them differently, what is important is their perception of that. Negative aspects of conversations by other students that concerned them tended to be explained away and rationalizations offered. In interpreting others and interpreting their own situations they are effectively trying to maintain some control in their social world of daily interactions as well as preserving a positive image for themselves.

In addition to asserting the positive aspect of their relationships with others in school, the sense these students made of the situation they are in, that is, the work experience class, and the reasons they gave for being in the class fits in with their conception of school and the reasons they gave for being in school. They generally stated positive feelings about work experience class and their dislikes were not negative reflections about the class. They indicated a desire to see their circumstances in a positive light and/or present it to others in the same way. These reactions are related to the need to maintain, as much as possible, some positive self-definition and a perspective which allows this.

#### Current Success and Future Identities

When students were asked to discuss their future intentions, some of them projected intelligible and attainable plans while others were vague and indefinite. The students in level three have definite aspirations and have obviously given some thought to their future. The boys in third level want to go to trade school. One boy wishes to be a "mechanic" and the other, a "carpenter" or "welder". They realize that high school certification will give them better chances for these occupational identities. They have committed themselves to that line of action and intend to return to school the next year to complete enough credits to be eligible for admission to trade school. The level three

girls do not want their school career to end "until" they "get grade 12". They are determined to acquire an identity associated with finishing school. While the third level girls are not definite about occupational identities beyond that, one of the girls suggested she "might like to be a stewardess or something interesting". This girl added that her job must be something that does not require "too many years studying". The other level three girl has thought about becoming a "hairstresser".

Some of the level one students were quite definite about future plans as well. One 17 year old boy wanted "to work on the oil rigs" or be "a sheet-metal worker", but he is not ready to "leave school yet". One 16 year old girl hopes "to get in the Armed Forces", and one 15 year old boy is very determined to "go to Montreal and be a hockey player". He projects this, not simply as a dream but, as a realistic hope.

Some others were rather vague and indefinite. One 17-year old girl "really didn't know" what he would like to do but "she would like to go to trade school". Another 15 year old girl pondered the possibility of becoming "a nurse" but this seemed too remote and too idealistic. In a similar vein, another 16 year old girl had thought about becoming a "French teacher" but realized that such an ambition would probably be too "hard" for her. Another boy with a very practical approach really did not "care as long as" he had

any kind of a "job".

The level three students and some from level one in this study have made some choices concerning their careers and futures and they have become committed to this line of action. They are willing to invest their time, hard work and energy to attain level two or three certification. These are students who in some situations define themselves as academic inferiors, "a slow learner" or a "poor reader" or in need of "extra help". However, success is an external as well as an internal support for construction of other types of identities and within the complex set of role identities the "slow learner" receded into the background. These students have experienced a degree of academic success over the past few years. One of the third level girls has 18 credits and is currently taking 11 others; the other girl has 20 credits and is working on 10; one third level boy has 14 credits and is now doing 11; the other boy has 9 credits and presently working on 11. Their positive feelings might stem from some external gratification as well as some intrinsic satisfaction that seems to be saying "look what I can do in spite of my circumstances and the definitions others give to me".

Some first level students, as well, spoke about the significance of success for them. One 17 year old boy, who had felt "bad" about failing and wanted to "quit" indicated that "this year" he feels "better" because he is now

"passing". His previous low self-esteem was obvious when he added: "I'm feeling wanted". Another first level 16 year old-girl explained that while she had not wanted to leave her friends, "this class had made me feel good about myself with or without my friends". This does not imply that success and other forms of identity assurance are similar for everyone. Academic success and "feeling good" about school is not important to everyone. For example, one 16 year old girl really "don't care" much about achieving academically and any academic identity is unimportant. Her preferred identity is outside school. As well, academic success is not the only kind of gratification in school. Social involvement is important to some students. Becoming involved in clubs, theatre groups, student council and various other activities increase students' self-esteem and prestige. Of course, a certain amount of self-esteem and self-assurance is required before a student becomes involved in such student activities. For students in special education a great deal is needed. School size can also be a feature in this. Small schools can make for easier personal relations between teachers and students and young students. Teacher attitudes play an important role, as well, in encouraging and supporting the involvement of students in the life of the school.

### Significant Others

As noted in the literature in Chapter 1 the importance of significant others to identity has been discussed for some time. The present study of the identities of work experience students also illustrates the salience of certain others in their lives. Specifically, their relationship with parents and friends was given attention.

#### Parents

An analysis of student comments relevant to parents as significant others suggests that it is appropriate to look at parental views concerning school, parental aspirations for their children who are work experience students, and the role of discussion and home help with regard to these students.

The majority of students expressed what they perceived to be parental preference for them to remain in school in order "to get an education". Typical of their perceptions were comments such as:

My mother wants me to finish school.  
(16 year old girl)

My parents would like to me to stay and  
finish school.  
(17 year old girl)

There were also statements indicating that some parents felt very strongly about their children in work experience staying to "finish high school". For example, one 17 year old, third level, girl from a family of four related that it

didn't "matter" to her mother if she was "thirty" when she finished school"; she would stay "until" she did. Her mother was determined that she was "not going to be like" her sister who had "quit" and then couldn't find a job. This girl's mother had told her to "study and get out of here". A 17 year old, first level boy, the tenth son of a family of eleven, said that his parents "felt bad" when he failed in previous years. There was some parental pressure on him to "smarten up" or he would wind up "like the rest" of his brothers who have "no education". Incidents where these feelings are expressed indicate a parental concern about what will happen to their children, as well as frustration, disappointment and an attempt to change the situation.

Other students portrayed their parents as "understanding". One 18 year old, third level boy, from a family of seven stated that while his parents preferred that he "stay and finish school", they don't "force him". If he decided to leave school, they would not pressure him to stay because "they understand". Understanding refers to parental acknowledgement of the difficulties this student has experienced with reading and writing and their realization of the effort required for him to complete high school. One 16 year old, first level girl, the youngest of eight, who indicated that she was in school only because her mother won't let her "quit", added that if she wanted to leave next



year, her mother would not force her to stay.

Pupils' interpretations of their parents point-of-view suggest that education for them, was not an end in itself but a means to an end - the end result being access "to trade school" and "a good job". Most parents had expressed, at one time or another, fairly definite ideas about the types of future they wanted for their children in work experience. Their aspirations were not stated as a specific job but related to continuing education after high school leading to qualifications in a skilled trade. Some parents of third level students, as well as a number from the first level group, wanted their children to go to trade school or vocational school. One other first level girl related that her mother wanted her "to be a nurse".

The parents of one third level boy from a family of seven had offered him the opportunity "to work in the family business" if he wanted to. They expressed their preference that he continue after high school and go "to trade school". A 17 year old, third level girl from a family of four declared that her mother just wanted her to "get out of here and get something better for yourself". Another mother of a 16 year old girl from a family of eight ruled out a traditional line of work. While her mother did not specifically state what she wanted her daughter to do, she was reported as adamant that her daughter was "not going to work in the fishplant".

A few students were not aware of what their parents wanted them to do. One boy, from a family of four, whose brothers and sister have also been involved in the special education program, stated that he had "no idea" of what his parents wanted. He added emphatically that he wanted to be a "hockey player" and declared that "they got nothing to do with it". Another boy, the sixth of seven children did not know what his parents thought he should do.

While discussing what they perceived as aspirations of their parents, the general comments of this group indicated what can be viewed as a desire for improved economic and status position. A "make something of yourself" type of future identity was implied in what students related about their parents. What some students reported as parental views were realistic, attainable goals, while others were more nebulous or not realistic regarding their children's competence. Of course, there is no line to divide what students have presented as parental feelings into the real or the ideal. Some parents might simply have presented unbridled hopes of "better" things for their children, while fully cognizant of a low probability. It does appear, however, that most parents believe that their children are capable of completing high school and going on to further education. The fact that their children are in a special education situation does not appear to influence the way they think about the courses of action available to

them. One can only guess at the amount of knowledge or kind of perceptions that some parents have of special education classes, even though information to parents from the school is fairly explicit. Or equally, some parents are aware of the movement of students into "regular" homerooms and that might account for their way of thinking.

The views of most parents and their aspirations as perceived by these students would suggest that parents and students have had discussions about school and future plans. Yet, when students were asked if they talked to their parents about school and about their future, most of these students indicated that there was very little ongoing talk of any nature. In most households, school and occupational choice were topics that arose "every now and then" and usually in particular situations, such as anger about failing. Some students in level 3 were the only ones to mention any routine talk about school. At the other extreme was one level I girl who related that she has rarely conversed with her parents about any matters, except "every now and then after supper".

Most encouragement and support for this group of students came mainly from other family members, particularly sisters. There was no difference in the gender of students who related this, but it was especially evident for students coming from larger families. These other members of the family were the ones to whom these work experience students

conversed the most. Their siblings have different educational backgrounds in that some had completed school and had gone onto further education, some were still in high school, while others had quit before completing high school. These siblings, however, all were reported to give encouragement to the idea of remaining in school "to try and finish".

When these students discussed home help with school work, they related that most other direct help came from these family members as well. Most students perceived their parents as willing to give help if it was needed, but mainly it was "my sister" who "helps me". A few students observed that they received no help at home. While they all did not include reasons one 16 year old girl whose mother wanted her to be a nurse, admitted that "my parents don't have enough education to help me". Only two of the students expressed strong family support in action as well as words. One 18 year old boy related that "everybody at home is interested, everybody helps. Everyone always helped me". For another 19 year old, while there are family problems, there is mutual support in that "they always ask about school. Did I have a test, etc. Mother always helps me".

There is similarity in what students expressed as their perspective on school and what they have observed to be their parents' views. Students indicated their

parents' ideal of a "good job" was skilled, fulltime employment. This was seen by some parents as a kind of upward mobility and by students as a secure future identity. These ideas however do not come close to telling us how or how much parents actually influence their children. But support in the form of help and understanding aids in forming certain ideas and maintaining other attitudes and identities.

### Friends

Dealing specifically with the role of friends in their lives, comments from the group of work experience students suggest that one should consider the present status of friends vis à vis the school. That is to say, the question of whether their friends are in or out of school and whether their friends are in the work experience group or in other groupings in the school.

All the students interviewed spoke of having friends whom they "go around with" on a regular basis. Students referred to the group they "hang around" with as the "bunch". The majority of these "bunches" consisted of a number of students who are still in school as well as others who have finished or quit school. Most level three students have friends in school in levels two and three of the regular high school program. All of them have friends who are out of school, as well. Similarly, the majority of first level students have friends out of school and in

school. Their in-school friends tended to be in levels one and two of the academic program not in work experience. A few of the first level students have friends in grades eight and nine and junior special education. Many of the students had one person who was seen as their "best friend", one to whom they could confide and "trust to keep secrets about personal matters" and whose opinion they valued and sought.

Another aspect of friends as significant others to the identities of these students is the extent to which their friends' future plans are similar to or different from their own. There was an overall similarity between the perceived views of the in-school friends and those of the students interviewed for both level three and level one students. Most in-school friends of level three students wanted to attend trade school. One 18 year old boy said that "a couple" of his friends had "applied for university". A 17 year old girl said that "most" of her friends had the same views as her. Their outlook was for "something interesting, full-time", and "not too many years studying". The in-school friends of level one students had expressed their hopes of "getting in trade school" or "joining the Armed Forces" while others "don't know what they want to do".

What students expressed as the occupational anticipations of their in-school friends differed from the occupational identities assumed by their out-of-school

friends, for level one and level three students. The greatest number of out-of-school friends of both groups worked at the fish plant. Others worked on LIP projects (Local Initiative Program) and some were unemployed. Most of the out-of-school friends of the level 3 students had completed a high school diploma. But, as one 18 year old reported, his friends had "not done much". They all were interested in doing something else like going "to Toronto or trade school or something like that". However, they had not been able to get the initiative "to do anything about it". Similarly, a 17 year old boy observed that his friends were "all bored". Some of them wished "they were back in school". Only one 19 year old girl felt that her friends had "good jobs - they are working for the government".

Level one students expressed similar views about their friends who were out of school. One difference was that many of this group's friends had not finished their high school diploma. This wasn't so for all, especially for one 16 year old who seemed to have a variety of different "worlds" in the "bunch" she "hangs around with". Some friends are "first and second year university" while others are "unemployed".

Finally, activities of friends is another aspect identified as important to features of identity in the work experience environment. "There's not much to do around

here" was one common complaint voiced by these students. The favourite weekend activity for most students, boys and girls, was "going to \_\_\_\_\_" (a local teenage hangout with video games, pool and snacks which attracts a large percentage of the school population). Organized activities, particularly sports, provided leisure-time enjoyment for a couple of the level three boys. They were involved in "hockey", "darts" and "basketball". Others did not mention any participation in organized teams or leagues. The boys in level I engaged in more traditional types of past-time, "setting snares" for rabbits, "cutting wood" for use at home or for sale and "fishing" and "trouting". These traditional rural past times are combined with more modern, urban "video games" playing and "watching" movies on the VCR. Most girls in levels one and three portrayed themselves as very subdued, "going for walks" with their friends, "studying together", "visiting each others houses", or sometimes "watching VCR". Occasionally, they might go to "a party" or a "dance".

#### Who Others Think I Am

In conjunction with the importance of significant others in the lives of the students and relating to the identities attributed to them by others, the present group were asked, in questionnaire form, to give their impression of others' views about them. While it is recognized that there is no assurance that student responses can be a



momentary whim and not a generally held view, the nature of their responses is consistent with other pertinent aspects related by the students and commented on throughout this chapter.

The responses of this in-school group are presented below in three parts, distinguished by differences in the relationship of these significant others to the students (Tables 5, 6, 7). Responses are given from ten students only, as one 19 year old third level girl did not complete this questionnaire.

The perceptions of students regarding parental judgements and opinions were expressed mainly along a moral dimension concerning character and behaviour (Table 5). The most striking characteristic of student responses to this item was the tendency to assign almost direct opposite views to each parent. Given that three of the students have one deceased parent, the percentage of students who felt that their parents saw them quite differently is high. Mothers were seen to think more highly of them than fathers; some fathers were felt to have a fairly negative opinion of their children in this group. These work experience students also tended to express what they perceived as their fathers' views of them in work-related terms, whereas their mothers' judgements were expressed in personality and character categories.

TABLE 5  
WHO OTHERS THINK I AM:  
STUDENT INTERPRETATIONS OF PARENTAL VIEWS

STUDENTS	MOTHER	FATHER
Age Sex Level		
17 M III	lazy	hardworker
18 M III	honest	bad
17 F III	reliable	(deceased)
16 F I	(deceased)	not lazy, funny
17 F I	nice	reliable
16 F I	sweet and innocent	(deceased)
16 F I	a nice little girl	a pest
15 M I	gorgeous person	good helper
17 M I	innocent	helpful
15 M I	not bad	foolish

Students' observations of their friends and other students' views of them were categorized along personality and character scales (Table 6). Overall, their responses about the views of these others were positive. The sentiments attributed to their best friends were more definitely affirmative than those attributed to other students.

It must be pointed out that some words with negative connotations are used in a different fashion by students. For instance, use of the word "retarded" (as in Table 6) is connected with merriment and humour, not stupidity. As well, "trouble" is often used to mean someone who creates a bit of disturbance, but in a pleasant manner or someone who gets things moving and doesn't let others escape situations without paying their dues.

TABLE 6

WHO OTHERS THINK I AM:

STUDENT INTERPRETATIONS OF VIEWS OF FRIENDS AND OTHER STUDENTS

STUDENTS			BEST FRIEND	OTHER STUDENTS
Age Sex Level				
17	M	III	kind	trouble
18	M	III	very friendly	nice
17	F	III	trustworthy	a friend
16	F	I	retarded, helpful	comical, funny
17	F	I	really good friend	ok
16	F	I	friendly	best kind, alright
16	F	I	nice	easy to get along with
15	M	I	cool	intelligent
17	M	I	alright	a pain
15	M	I	nice, alright	good

TABLE 7

WHO OTHERS THINK I AM:

STUDENT INTERPRETATIONS OF VIEWS OF TEACHERS

STUDENTS			HOMEROOM TEACHER	OTHER TEACHERS
Age Sex Level				
17	M	III	nice person	lazy
18	M	III	kind	nice, kind
17	F	III	a silly person	another student
16	F	I	alright	not bad at my subjects
17	F	I	alright	good
16	F	I	alright	alright
16	F	I	sweet	doing fine
15	M	I	good in class	a good student
17	M	I	alright	smart
15	M	I	cracked	mad

The responses of these students to their teachers' opinion and views about them were related in personal as well as academic dimensions (Table 7). Overall, most students perceived that teachers viewed them in a positive manner, with only two students expressing negative interpretations. The views that students assigned to other teachers were expressed a bit more positively than those attributed to the

homeroom teacher. Students used more academic and ability oriented categories when giving their interpretations of the views of other teachers. They used more personal categories when giving their impressions of the views of their homeroom teacher. It must be added that the usage of the word "alright" by students generally indicates that one is "pretty good" or "fine enough".

It is interesting to note that, generally, the overall responses of students to this questionnaire (Appendix C) were along positive lines regardless of the categories that students chose to use. They expressed their interpretations of others' views in academic, behavioural, personality and character divisions. The most negative perceptions about them by others were attributed to their fathers. Yet, underlying student responses throughout this chapter is a fairly stable view of their own identity and their relations with others. The overall reaction by students to this questionnaire is in keeping in other comments throughout this chapter.

## CHAPTER IV

### IDENTITY IN THE TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO WORK

The transition from school to work is a major status passage in life. The time frame of this passage varies with individuals as does the type of occupational identity assumed. The developmental process leading to that time begins in early childhood and revolves around the interplay of social, cultural, and institutional factors within the realm of personal identity. This reciprocal and progressive process that forms one's perspective can be distinguished from the sometimes momentary event or situation that leads an individual to leave school. The actual time of school leaving might be the result of some chance happening, such as a family illness or problem at school. Similarly, a particular individual might be in a particular line of work today because that job became available yesterday. When the decision to leave school is made, one is on the threshold of assuming a new identity. The consequent changes in daily situations, patterns of behaviour, required roles and demands made, could be a stressful and a rather traumatic and problem-filled period. But the essence of understanding the impact of such junctures on identity is to focus on subjective meaning.

The transition from school to work and its

significance for the identities of a group of former work experience students is examined in this chapter. The observations made by this group are discussed under three topics. The first topic is their retrospective interpretations of school. The second topic includes their observations on the actual move from school to work, the factors that could influence this move and the definitions of problems the transition created. Finally, their present circumstances are analyzed and their satisfaction with these circumstances are noted.

#### Retrospective Interpretations of School

In recalling past experience, Schutz (1967) points out that only a small part of the totality is retained in consciousness. Memories are by no means perfect. Much is forgotten, repressed or remembered selectively. Yet what is retained is solidified in recollection as memorable and recognizable and has bearing on one's identity at that time, as well as one's current identity. An analysis of this group's recollections about school is given here in three parts: (1) reflections about their attitudes toward school, (2) their impressions of teachers and subjects, and (3) their views of the role of their parents.

Reflections on School

In reflecting on their attitudes toward school, the majority of these young people were quite definite about the feelings of like or dislike they had while attending school. Only a few were unable to decide whether they had actually liked it or not.

Many of the students interviewed recalled their dislike of school and explained reasons for their sentiments. The identities associated with their career as students were not always positive. This is evident from the comments of an 18 year old boy, who had been in the work experience program for one year and had "disliked school" while he was there. For him, "it was boring". For one 19 year old boy, student identity as a work experience student or as a student in regular class did not affect his attitude. He had accumulated 20 high school credits and was slated to move to a grade 12 homeroom, but quit instead. All aspects of school were negative and he complained that in itself "school was boring".

One 20 year old student, who had been in special education classes throughout his school career and in work experience for three years attributed his dislike of school to the necessity of "getting up in the mornings", yet he would rather "be out working". His image of the working world was obviously not in line with reality. Clearly, as



well, the student identity was not the one preferred by him. He made reference to having stayed "too long" in school and had felt that he "should have left before". An 18 year old boy, whose school career showed lengthy absenteeism, periods of dropping out and returning, narrated a list of reasons why he "definitely" disliked school. These included a dislike for teachers and school rules. His identity in school was clearly portrayed in his comment that he "got into trouble all the time" and justifiably carried the label of a trouble-maker. Similarly, a series of failures and placement in the work experience class probably contributed to his belief that he could not do well in school. In his words "my brain got blocked up".

A few students related that they had liked school, but reasons for liking school were not explicitly stated. A 17 year old girl, who had left school in the mid-term of her second year in work experience because of family related problems observed that "when I was in school I did like it". There was a qualification, however, as there were "some days" when she did not like being a student. A 19 year old boy, who spent one year in the work experience class expressed his overall liking for school, but he "didn't like" the "teacher who gave" him "a hard time" for no apparent reason. This boy expressed his dislike for that teacher a number of times throughout the interview and

questionnaire. However, his views about this teacher did not colour his entire feelings about school.

Some other students expressed an ambivalent attitude toward school. For one 19 year old boy, the time spent in school was "all right in one way", but "not all right in another". In particular, he "didn't like homework". The demands that related to his student identity conflicted with his identity as a family member and he had difficulty completing home assignments because of "too much noise" and "too many people at home". He was referring to living at home with thirteen other family members. For him, being a student was "all right" until "you get older". That identity for him then was no longer a suitable one. Similarly, an 18 year old boy saw the student identity as one he "liked" only "sometimes".

#### Impressions of Teachers

When the members of his former work experience group were questioned regarding their opinions about the teachers they had in school, they expressed a wide range of feeling - from "hating" teachers to viewing teachers as "perfect". For the most part, these former students referred to positive qualities of teachers and many judged them independently of their overall school likes and dislikes. For example, a 19 year old boy who had described school as a "boring" place attributed both positive personal and professional identities to his teachers. He thought "they

were mostly all good people and teachers". A 17 year old girl who "liked school" related that "all" of her teachers were "pretty good". She perceived them to be "very fair". This was obviously an important attribute to her. Another 20 year old boy who had said he disliked school also felt that "most" of his teachers were "all right". An 18 year old boy, who had given a list of his school dislikes, referred to "some" of the teachers as "all right".

One 19 year old viewed "all" of his teachers as "perfect" except one, whom he "still dislikes". This boy was mentioned previously in relation to an episode with one teacher. That particular incident with that teacher turned out to be very significant for this boy and obviously was not forgotten. "Whatever occurred during this episode sparked off an act of vandalism against the teacher, an action not previously part of the boy's behavioural identity. There was a subsequent suspension by the school and following that a decision on the boy's part not to return to school. Being suspended and viewed by others as a vandal played a role in his decision not to return. This incident was a turning point in the boy's career. It was a critical experience in both its subjective and objective effects on his career. The boy's "dislike" of that teacher related not only to the incident, but to what ensued because he saw the teacher as the cause. Only one boy was very negative about "most" teachers. This 18 year old stated

that he "hated" teachers and verbalized his all-encompassing identity for them as "bastards".

In conjunction with their feelings about teachers, the former students were asked how they perceived themselves as having been "treated" by teachers while they were students. The majority of the group felt that the manner in which teachers behaved toward them was "all right". The 17 year old girl viewed the way teachers behaved towards her as "good" but pointed out that certain unacceptable attitudes and behaviours by students would warrant a different kind of treatment. She obviously did not assign herself the kind of identity she assigned to students who were treated other than "good". The 18 year old boy who "hated" teachers did not feel that they allotted any special identity to him or behaved differently toward him because he was in work experience. The manner in which he was treated was "the same as everyone else in class". The 19 year old boy referred to previously did not allow his hostility toward a specific teacher to influence his regard for others, whose manner of behaviour made him "feel comfortable" while he was a student.

Some of the group distinguished between teachers on the basis of their conduct toward students. For one 19 year old boy there were "some teachers" who treated him "all right" but there were others who were viewed as "pushy and bossy" and were portrayed by him as ordering students to "do this, do that". An 18 year old held seemingly conflicting

views, as he felt that teachers were "all right", yet he saw them depriving students of their identities as persons, and treating them like "dirt". As a student, he had felt singled out for more than the usual unspecified ill-treatment, for teachers "treated everyone that way but treated me worse".

#### Parental Role in Schooling

At the core of the issue of the importance of home environment on student identity as it relates to achievement and performance in school is the student's perception of the role played by parents in helping their children with school-related work. It was found that most of the group perceived some form of help from parents. Only a few felt there was no home help available.

One 19 year old boy from a family of six felt very strongly about the importance of the role played by his parents in any achievement he had made in school and he "would not have gotten this far" if it were not "for their help and support". Some others felt that there had been help at home but not on a regular basis. For instance, an 18 year old boy, the second youngest of fourteen children, reported that his "father helps sometimes". Others, perceived a willingness of parents to help when needed. One 20 year old boy from a family of five reported that his parents helped him "some of the time, when I asked them to".

Two of the former students related that they had

received "no help" at home while they were students. An 18 year old boy, the eleventh of twelve children, stated that his parents had given him "no help". A 17 year old girl said that she had "no help" at home. She indicated her feeling of independence in her achievements and felt she would "rather have done it" on her own.

Focusing on home discussions about school and school work when they had been in school, the majority of this group indicated that this subject had not been given a great deal of consideration in their homes. The following are typical of the responses made:

"I didn't talk to my parents about school".  
(18 year old boy)

"No discussion...."  
(20 year old boy)

"No, I sort of kept all my problems to myself."  
(17 year old girl)

Two of the former students reported having had some discussions about school-related topics with their parents, but it was not a routine part of daily conversations. Similar to the in-school group, it was more a subject brought up when a particular situation arose, such as failure or a reported truancy.

#### Transition from School to Work

The comments of the former students relating to

their leaving school and taking on a new identity in the work place raises the question of the importance of preparation from previous experience in lessening the impact of such a change. Specifically, former students gave their views on school as preparation for the work world. Their perceptions regarding parental attitudes, influence, and support raises the question of the importance of parents as significant others in maintaining one's continuity of identity and identity development. The definitions of problems encountered in the transition give some indication of the perspective and values of these individuals.

#### School as Preparation for the Work World

The views of former students on school as preparation for the world of work were evenly split. One half of them were of the opinion that school had helped to prepare them while the other half concluded that school had not helped to prepare them. For those who felt that school had prepared them, the meanings assigned to school as preparation differed. For one 18 year old boy the development of certain attributes that had become part of his self-image was the way he considered the school's accomplishment. He felt that school had given him a "sense of responsibility". A 17 year old girl attributed to her

schooling years certain beliefs about work and her philosophy of life. School, for her, was the place where she had learned:

That the working world was not going to be all sunshine for us and that we would have to try very hard to get what we can out of life.

An 18 year old boy, who had disliked school and its teachers, nevertheless, felt that school had made some provision and had helped him. The value he placed on school related directly to his identity as a worker in the work experience program and the fact that he, upon leaving school, had found employment at one of the businesses where he had been placed while in the program. One 19 year old boy expressed a similar idea of the benefit of school as it related to direct job experience and assistance in obtaining a job. He felt that if he had stayed in school, or "given more time", he would have been better prepared for his new identity in the work world.

On the negative side, some other members of the group expressed very firm and definite opinions about the "zero" value of school as preparation for the transition to work. A 19 year old boy, who had spent two years in the work experience program, had amassed 20 high school credits and who dropped out the year he was slated to move to a grade 12 homeroom viewed all aspects of school as totally lacking in relevance to his new identity. His job "in a



fish plant" he felt, had "nothing to do with" his years of formal education. A 20 year old boy was equally emphatic about his belief that school had done nothing "whatsoever" to prepare him. He felt that the longer he had stayed in school, the less he had learned, and that he had stayed in school "too long to learn anything". Another 18 year old boy felt that school had offered him "nothing" and had done "nothing" to prepare him for the work world. He doubted that the school was totally responsible for this "because" his image of himself as a student was as one who "didn't do anything". While recognizing his own lack of commitment, he could not exempt schools, because they "shouldn't be so hard on students".

#### Parental Attitudes and Influence

At the time of this study, all former work experience students were living at home with their parents. This sort of continuity in private life minimizes some of the changes associated with moving to the world of work. Of course, perceived parental feelings and support for leaving school is an important aspect, as parental attitudes are more difficult to ignore while living at home. They can be tuned out but not entirely escaped.

According to the views given by most of the former work experience students their parents preferred that they remain in school. Most perceived that their parents were "not happy" about them "leaving school". Parental opinion

alone did not influence their children's decision and the parents did not appear to try any sort of persuasion or direct action. Rather, most of these parents were portrayed as tolerant, understanding and supportive, allowing students to make their own decisions. As one 18 year old boy summed up, "it was my decision. It was left up to me, but they weren't happy". The 19 year old boy who quit after an incident with one teacher expressed his parent's understanding, support and acceptance of his definition of the situation. He had "a little trouble" because his parents "weren't happy" with his proposal to leave, but "they understood" once he had explained "the situation". The 17 year old girl explained that while her parents "didn't like" her decision to leave and help her mother through an illness, they offered an alternative by telling her that she could "always go to night school". One 20 year old boy indicated his independence from parental control by relating that "they were not happy about me leaving school, but that's all they can do".

Two boys referred to having "no problem" with their parents when they wanted to leave. The parents of one 18 year old boy "didn't mind" provided that he "had a job". Another 18 year old obviously had more than verbal support from his parents, as he had left during the first semester to work for his father.

### Problems in Transition

What these former students viewed as problems in their transition from school to work gives an indication of the kinds of things they value, the framework they use for making sense of the world, and of their identities in that world. One discussion with these former students focused on what constituted problems for them. What they designated as difficulties centered almost entirely around money, or more accurately, lack of money. The most pressing problems concerned matters such as "bills", "paying the rent", "spending too much" and having to "watch expenses".

For one 20 year old boy "having no work" and "no UIC coming in" was a very real problem. His previous job had not lasted long enough to entitle him to unemployment insurance benefits, and he was looking for any kind of job to "get enough stamps". For him, any occupation would do. When one is unemployed, occupational identity is not an issue. But for most of this group, kinds of occupational identities were not a problem either. It was of little importance, in reality, as the identity of simply being a wage earner was primary in their view. This group talked about having "a job with low stamps" as creating problems, because they would inevitably get "laid off" and have "to draw low UIC". Jobs were measured solely on an

economic scale. Some of the former students were looking for jobs with "better pay" to "improve their stamps". Being unemployed was not an identity issue as long as the "UIC" was "coming in". Collecting unemployment insurance is important for most of these former students. The importance was made quite clear and it has become a way of life for most of this group.

The only other problem any member of this group associated with "drawing UIC" was related by a 19 year old boy whose main concern was "passing away the time" while on UIC. He solved this quite deftly by assuming an identity traditionally associated with those communities - "going in the woods" to cut logs for sale as firewood. This supplied him with extra money as well as a solution to his problem. Only one boy, a 19 year old, expressed an attitude that differed from the others. According to him, "any one who is not working is lazy". He did not include himself in that category as he stated that he had "not been without a job since" he "left school". He felt that all a person had to do is make an effort and "look around", and he would find a job.

Generally, the transition from school to work was relatively smooth for most of these young people. There were no major traumas, dramatic changes of floundering in a new identity. It was more a process of settling into an identity that they preferred. There are many factors that

could account for the ease of change in moving from school. Continuity of family relationships and support, previous experience with work, and a voluntary decision to move to a new status are some factors. Important for some of this group as well, was that they were leaving behind both an undesirable career as a student, an undesirable identity in that career, and an undesirable place; the school.

### Attitudes and Life in the World of Work

Moving from the identities, behaviours and attitudes of the past, this section deals with the phase of life that this group of former work experience students are currently passing through. Their observations are divided into the three parts: (1) persisting orientations, (2) the importance of friends, and (3) employment and satisfaction.

#### Persisting Orientation

In analyzing the comments of this group regarding their attitudes toward school from their standpoint in the work world, a continuation of past orientations was revealed. Identities and attitudes are not confined to the current time of their lives but are reflections of preceding phases and for many of these former students there was no change in their disposition toward school. A few others who had been ambivalent in their feelings now clearly realized their preference.

For a 20 year old boy, his current identity out of school was the more desirable one. In terms of emotional changes, he has "felt better" since he left school. Even the physical constraints of being a student were happily left behind by him, for when you are "out of school" you can do other things like "walking around". The kinds of things done in school were not viewed as work by him, at least not the kind of work he wished. Even though he is not employed on a regular basis, "doing a bit of work" whenever and wherever he could is reward enough. An 18 year old boy continued to feel "dislike" for school as well, and saw it as a rather repugnant place that had "never changed". Similarly for another 18 year old boy, the meaning of school had not changed. However, he expressed a wish to "finish school". The value he placed on credentials and his desire to be a high school graduate conflicts with his continuing "dislike" of school and prevents him from going "back". His inability to come to terms with this conflict was brought out in his "not" wanting to attend "night school" either.

Those in the group who professed to have liked school while attending, continued to do so. A 19 year old boy "would still like to be in school" but the rewards associated with his work identity are a powerful incentive. It increasingly becomes too difficult "to stop making money and go to school". The 17 year old girl for whom the work world was "not all sunshine" preferred whatever her student

identity had offered her. "Right now", she said, "I miss being in school" and "I wish I had to stay in school". Differing from the girl was an 18 year old boy, who, previously ambivalent now derived great satisfaction from his work identity, particularly the financial rewards of "making money". This aspect has made him feel "much happier" since he left school.

### The Importance of Friends

The comments of this group about their friends and activities reiterate the importance of friends as significant others in maintaining one's world and their identity within that world. For former special education students the mutually sustaining and reinforcing support for each other's identity was in their day to day contact over a long period of time, in the similarities of their friends and themselves and in their leisure activities.

People have as friends those whom they like, respect and "get along" with. With the exception of one young man, the others in this group interviewed had a number of friends with whom they had contact on a daily basis. The friendships were not the short-term, instrumental types, but were very long lasting. Some had been friends "since" they "started school", or "for 15 years" or "7 years", with the shortest friendship being "2 years" in duration. The one 18 year old boy who didn't have any friends he saw "all the

time used to go around with one fellow but he's gone to Toronto". This friend was obviously very important for this boy as he was considering moving to Toronto to join his friend.

The friends of these special education students were like them in significant respects. They had all come from similar cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, had remained in their home communities and had similar lifestyles and occupations. There was consistent reaffirmation of work-related identities as some of this group worked with their friends, while others had the support of their friends holding similar types or jobs or "drawing UIC".

The leisure activities engaged in with their friends were an important aspect of their life and their world. These former students and their friends enjoyed "fun" things together. Common values and patterns of behaviour were shown, not only among friends but among the group interviewed. Typical of the types of things in their sphere of action were:

My friends and I like to smoke dope and  
drink beer

(18 year old boy)

Go to clubs.

(19 year old boy)



Fix cars and drink beer.

(18 year old boy)

Drive around, go to .....(local hangout), parties.

(18 year old boy)

We love teasing young girls, smoking dope as in hash, or pot, no hard drugs and having a ball, more or less.

(19 year old boy)

### Employment and Satisfaction

At the time of this study, four of the former work experience students interviewed were working full-time, three were "on UIC" and one young man was neither working nor on UIC. Of those employed, two were working "in a fishplant", one was "on a LIP Grant" (Local Initiative Programs); and the other was employed by his father working with "trucks, buses, and backhoes". Only two of the group had worked steadily since leaving school. Others had had a number of job changes, some as many as three because the nature of the employment was short-term or seasonal. Jobs were generally interspersed with periods of UI benefits or vice versa. The jobs held were of the unskilled type— farm work, babysitting, LIP projects, janitorial work and cutting wood, with the fish plants offering the main source of employment.

When one thinks of occupations or careers, one often

thinks in terms of a decision or a choice regarding future identity. Society provides a repertoire of identities for people to be. But circumstances, social and economic, and one's perspective are often restrictive and limiting in the process of choice. The sorts of opportunities open to these former students was limited by job availability as well. For most individuals in this group, job identities were not so much chosen as simply taken. They were "lucky" enough to get a job that had become available, and the job-related identity was of little consequence to them.

In a discussion about jobs and types of jobs these former students were asked about satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their lifestyles and whether they had other preferences. Their identities are not solely confined to their lives at this time, but also include anticipations of the future. The majority of these individuals did not aspire to new future occupational identities. They expressed satisfaction with what they were doing, whether it was "drawing unemployment", or working "in the plant". In general, they explained that they were "happy" and there was "nothing else" they would like to do. A few boys expressed what they considered their preference if they had a choice. One 18 year old boy, with great sincerity, stated that his real preference was to "work only in the winter". His problem was finding a way to accomplish that in an area

where opportunities for enough employment to "get stamps" were available mainly in the spring and summer months. Another 18 year old boy, who had left his job at a dairy farm to draw "UIC" seriously expressed his preference as "not to work at anything". A few others mentioned variations in what they were already doing. A 20 year old boy, who had worked as a janitor, and had a "bit of work" here and there, but was not working now, said that he was "happy" with this, but would really like "to do carpenter work". A 19 year old boy saw his future identity "in the plant" because he had "liked it" when he had been employed there. Two of the former work experience students expressed dissatisfaction with their present circumstances and desired a future occupational identity a bit more ambitious than their present. One 19 year old boy was "not happy" with his present line of work in the fish plant. What he really wanted was "to be a mechanic". An 18 year old boy was "not happy" with his present situation and wished "to become a fireman in the Armed Forces".

Overall, for many of these individuals, job security, job status and, job mobility are not important. Their identities as wage earners are sufficient. Short-term jobs and drawing UIC are not debilitating identities for them, or do they cause resentment or even resignation. These former students are simply contented with their way of life. Their frames of reference are grounded in families

where other members have similar ways of life, their friends are similar and they live in communities where seasonal employment is the traditional and only way of life for the majority of the inhabitants. Their school careers have played a role in their expectations and identity constructions. They had no great hopes to be dashed when they left school. So, generally, they portray positive feelings about their current identities of sporadic work, low pay and unemployment.

The group of former work experience students described in this chapter bear a striking resemblance to a group distinguished by Ashton and Field (1976) in their empirical study of young workers and their adjustment to work. Their distinctions between groups is important in understanding the process of occupational choice and the ease, or lack thereof, in the transition from school to work. They separated three groups characterized by different identities, frames of reference and orientation to work. The acquisition of different frames of reference is seen by these authors as a major influence in occupational choice. These frames of reference are associated with different social class positions and function to establish orders of relevance and types of rewards realized in different occupations. The group termed the "careerless" by Ashton and Field are similar to the former work experience students studied in the present research. Similarity exists within a number of areas - their social backgrounds, their

identities experienced in school, their general attitudes toward school, their adjustment into the work force, the type of occupation assumed and even their leisure activities.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

The present research focused on the identities of a particular segment of students in the regular school milieu - those who have been classified as Special Education students and placed in a senior special education class, called Work Experience. The intent in this chapter is to summarize the research by way of giving a brief overview of the theoretical orientation, the research methods and the research findings. Theoretical problems and practical implications arising from the research are noted as well.

#### Theoretical Orientation

The purpose of this research was an inquiry into the identity of senior high school special education students. The concept of identity was approached within a sociological context and the theoretical framework was provided by symbolic interactionism. This approach deals with the subjective realities of actors in the world, the meanings given their experiences and definitions of the identity as a particular person in the world. Symbolic interactionism concentrates on the actors' point of view for they are the only ones who can relate how it is they feel, think, experience, desire or intend.

Identity is conceived of as a social phenomenon in the sense that it arises in society and is maintained by virtue of social processes. This conception of identity is not taken to mean that man is simply a product of social roles, norms and labels. Rather man is viewed by interactionists as a self-producing being continually constructing his own identity, modifying and remodifying that identity in socialization throughout life. It is in primary socialization that the "generalized other" is built up. Through language and role processes one's view of self is formed, and simultaneously plans of action are developed. These processes are core to the development of the "me" as distinct from the "I". At the same time there is the establishment of a continuous and coherent identity that is related to and differentiated from others.

Identity in this view is different from self but identity is part of self. The self is both subject and object, whereas identity relates to the self as object. As identity is developed in everyday activity the biographical and cumulative aspect of persons is seen as an important part of one's own personal identity. This is distinguished from one's social identity, which is the cumulative view others have of a person. Certain situated identities, ways a person sees himself in particular situations, are important aspects as well. These may become built into a person's substantialist account of identity and may sub-

sequently be the basis for change and modification.

The significant others of primary socialization are important in shaping one's identity. In later socialization others are deemed to be important by their continuity, nearness and the degree to which they are credited significance by the individual. Social factors of class and culture play a role in identity construction. Identity is seen by symbolic interactionists as open and changeable, not formed and structured once and for all. It is process, not structure.

The secondary socialization process revolves around institutional based "sub-worlds". School is an important part of secondary socialization with implications for identity development. The process of schooling can influence not only pupils' views of themselves but their actions and evaluation of courses of action. Within schools, educational and institutional labels are constructed and are often taken for granted through both formal and informal rules and procedures. These labels are, in fact, one type of social identity which affects the students' progression through the school system.

The concept of career enables us to capture both the subjective and objective dimensions of pupils' movement through school. Students' objective careers are the way in which they move through the grades or levels in school. It is the public aspect. The idea of subjective career allows



for pupils' individual definitions and meanings, their personal views of their social identity and their personal evaluation of the more objective facets. It is the private aspect of one's identity. Exploration of a pupil's career from the subjective side captures the meaning of particular situations and circumstances as well as one's attitudes and goals. Symbolic interactionism starts with the subjective realities of the actors involved. It is with this in mind that the present research tries to understand special education students' conceptions of their identity in the world.

#### Research Methods

The research problem in this study was one of trying to "get at" and understand the identity of work experience students and the implications of schooling for the social construction of identities which students have for themselves. The question is one of how students in work experience view themselves, their experiences and their circumstances in the school and community.

Data on which the research is based were taken from the responses of two groups of work experience students. The first group was composed of students currently in school in a work experience class; the second group was composed of former work experience students who have been out of school for one to three years. All individuals in each group were students of the researcher at one time or another. Three

questionnaires were administered separately to the in-school students; two questionnaires were administered to out-of-school students at a different time. The first questionnaire administered to both groups was the same and contained questions regarding demographic information (Appendix A). A second questionnaire was administered to in-school students to elicit feelings and views about school, about work experience class and other significant others (Appendix B). Out-of-school students were given different questionnaires to elicit their responses to schooling, to current work situations and to significant others in their lives as well as their reactions to the transition from school to work (Appendix D). In-school students only were given a third questionnaire to obtain their views about how others see them (Appendix C).

Interviews were also held with both groups of work experience students at different times. The interviews with both groups were of a semi-structured nature. With in-school students, the sessions were tape recorded. Students were invited to give their feelings about themselves in relation to school, friends, parents and future wishes. The sessions with out-of-school students were not tape recorded. These interviews centered around the present life and circumstances of these former students and life in their home communities.

The data collected were analyzed with a commitment

to the world of the actors, their viewpoints and definitions. Student observations were analyzed with the intent of looking for similarities or differences in their comments. Theoretical insights and concepts were employed as deemed appropriate to give broader meanings to the comments and observations relating to the identities of work experience students. Verbatim comments are used to illustrate different dimensions of the theoretical concepts employed.

#### Research Findings

The present task is to give a brief recapitulation of the main points that have emerged from the data analysis. While no clear-cut, definitive conclusions generalizable to other students are drawn from the present research, it is possible to point to major themes arising from the responses of the in-school students and out-of-school students, as well as themes common to both groups. Thereby, it is possible to gain insight into the processes of developing and maintaining a particular orientation to life in a work experience situation both within and outside school boundaries. These processes are intertwined with and influenced by the labels given to these individuals by formal schooling.

Turning first to the in-school students and their

7

orientation to school, it was seen that their overall attitude toward school was positive. However, they had contrasting reasons for liking school, which included the aim of "getting an education" and of "passing away time". While reflecting on their careers in school these students noted cycles of like and dislike. These cycles of dislike were related to failure in different grades or failure to undergo some other desired status passage in school. Many students indicated the short-term effect that failure of this sort had on their self-definitions. In particular the negative effects on their situated identities were noted,

Relating to students' orientations to school, subjects and the formation of what may be described as subject identities were seen to be of importance for students. Subject identities, such as "good at math", "poor at reading" have become part of the way certain students have defined themselves. These identities play a role in student performance in those subjects, their feelings and plans of action regarding those subjects. They were not seen to play a part in students' overall plans regarding school, however.

Student reports on attitudes toward failure in school varied. While most students had felt "bad" or "down" when they had failed a grade, some students "really didn't care". Regardless of their feelings at the time of failure

the students who had failed reported an immediate effect on their orientation to school, their feelings about themselves and most of them had not wished to return to school the following year after they failed. However, over time most students found ways to legitimate themselves and their school failure. Negative self-labels and situated identities are accommodated and rationalized to the point where students become committed to goals and values, like completing high school, despite the seeming conflict with their situated identities as failures.

Regarding student interpretations of their placement in a work experience situation, all indications point to a view that work experience class is not seen as a shattering stigma or classification or threat to a positive definition of self. They even expressed positive feelings about being in special education and many of the reasons they gave for their placement fitted in with overall reasons for being in school. Interestingly, most students observed that they felt no different from other students in the school and that they related well with other students and teachers in school. The emphasis by these students was on pointing out similarities and minimizing differences between themselves and others.

The future identities projected by these students for themselves were mainly those related to skilled trades and requiring further education. Many of these students had

taken steps in this direction by registering for credit courses and being willing to return to school and gain enough high school credits to gain entry to vocational or trade schools. For this group of students, internalization of self-identity was, in some sense, not related to the generally held views of their status position in the school structure.

3 The aspects of student feelings discussed here in relationship to placement in special education classes are different from those reported in studies of special education students. In other studies, students are reported to feel ostracized, stigmatized and ridiculed e.g. Edgerton, (1967); Hobbs, (1975). Similarly other students are reported to feel that chances for later job opportunities were hurt by virtue of being in a special education situation (Jones, 1972). While the studies referred to above are about students feelings and attitudes, from most of the literature it would appear that the objective consequences of classification of students have been more systematically studied than the self-definitional effects. In the literature there seems to be an inherent, unstated but accepted proposition that students in lower streams and in particular special education classes have devalued and negative personal identities. The reports of the students involved in this study do not indicate this type of feeling or self-identity.

Moving to significant others in the lives of in-school students, parents and friends were obviously the core significant others in the lives of these work experience students. These students reported their parents as having beliefs about education similar to themselves. They perceived their parents as feeling that they should remain in school and get a high school diploma in order to enter trade school. Parents were seen to want their work experience children to get educational credentials and go on to an improved economic and status position. However, most support, encouragement and direct help came from other family members. These other family members were sisters.

It is also interesting to find that the friends of this in-school group of students tended not to be in a special education situation. Many of their friends were in levels 1 or 11 of the regular high school program along with others who are currently out of school. Their friends were seen to be like them in other important respects such as desiring a similar future identity and the enjoyment of similar activities. These students had a close relationship with their friends and spent a great deal of time with them.

The identities of out-of-school students are discussed here as they relate to three topics: recalled orientations to school, observations about the transition from school to work and remarks about their current

circumstances. In recalling how they had felt about school while they were attending, many students referred to their dislike of school and brought up certain social and educational identities they had held while in school. Some other students related that they had liked school when they were students, while a few others expressed an ambivalent attitude. Whether or not students had liked school, the school situation did not seem to have a great deal of significance for them. There was a lack of impact and a kind of indifference. Many brought up a time element in terms of status passages attached to their career as students. For them there was an age when having the identity of a student was no longer suitable or desired; it was an age when they felt they should be out of school and in a workers' identity. They no longer thought of themselves as children but perceived themselves as adults, and therefore, they should be out of school.

Teachers and the treatment of students by teachers were also commented on by different students. The out-of-school group professed to have liked their teachers while they were students and many attributed both positive personal and professional qualities to their teachers. Their attitudes towards their teachers were not governed by their like or dislike of school in general. Teachers were seen as individuals and not judged by school orientation. As students this group generally felt that they had been



treated "all right" by those who had taught them.

Regarding the role of parents in the formation of student identity, their actual achievement and overall performance, most of the out-of-school students perceived that help from home relating to schoolwork had been available if required and sought after, but home discussions centering around school were not usual. At the time these students planned to leave school they all perceived that their parents would have preferred them to remain in school, but their parents took no direct action to ensure that their children would stay in school. Rather students were left to make their own decisions and often it seemed as if their parents would have supported them either way.

The transition from school to work was, overall, an easy process for these students. The problems encountered in the move to the work world centered solely around money. Occupational identities in low-paying jobs with no security was not an identity issue for them. Simply leaving school and being a wage earner was enough to preserve their positive orientations to self. Students gave their views on school as preparation for work. Some of the former students felt that school had helped to prepare them for the work world by instilling certain attitudes that they internalized as part of their identity. Others felt that preparation from school was via their direct job experience, an aspect of the senior special education class. However, certain

former students viewed school as totally lacking in relevance to their work related identities.

Moving to the current phase of the life of these former students and their present attitudes it was seen that there was a persistence of their previous attitudes toward school. Their definitions had not changed in the years they were out of school. Those who had previously expressed an ambivalent attitude about their student careers felt that their current identities as workers was the one they preferred because they felt "happier".

The importance of friends as significant others to these former students was shown in their daily contact with each other, the length of time they had been friends and the similarities between them and their friends. The mutually sustaining and reinforcing support for each others' identities was seen in the similarity of work-related identities, socio-economic backgrounds and the value placed on leisure activities.

The current work identities of these former students are ones of sporadic work, low pay and unemployment. But these are not debilitating identities for these students and they have no desire generally for new future identities in different occupations. Most of the group expressed satisfaction with their present circumstances and lifestyles. For many of these former students there was no conflict between ideal and real images of themselves.

Taking the observations of the in-school students and the out-of-school students involved in this research as a package, there is no homogeneity of viewpoints, perspectives or personal identities. Regarding school there is no simple dichotomy of conformity as a group based on their place in the school structure. There is a diversity of feelings, meanings and differing assessments of different goals. There are more similarities in identity within each group than between groups. However, within the differing views of the work experience students, an overall connecting theme running through their accounts is the positive fashion in which they are able to define themselves. From an objective stance these students and former students are identified by others as school failures and drop-outs with low-level pay and employment. In terms of dominant beliefs of society, the placement in special education classes and the types of occupational identities assumed by some and aspired to by others are the least desirable. They are society's failures. Yet, the way in which these work experience students view themselves is far from negative.

#### Theoretical Problems and Empirical Questions

The main theoretical concern in this research centers around the problem of understanding another's subjectivity. This concern is both theoretical and method-

ological. In the present discussion the theoretical underpinnings of this problem are alluded to as both theoretical and empirical questions arising out of this study. It should be emphasized that the subjectivity question in the present study related to trying to understand students' feelings and experiences as they work out their personal identities. It has been pointed out by both Schutz (1967) and Laing (1967) that we can never get totally inside another's mind and see exactly how it works, or exactly how another thinks and understands. While this is so, we can move toward some kind of understanding of the perspectives and realities of others.

There was some difficulty in this study for the researcher to distinguish the purely presentational, self-preserving aspects of student comments from the essential felt and believed aspects that are part of personal identity. For instance, in interpreting the reasons for their placement in special education class many students gave the official rhetoric of the school as their reason. One might well ask: Is it that these students are simply parroting words in an effort to protect their identities or has this been internalized as part of their belief system and innermost thoughts and feelings? Even though their idea of special class fits with their definitions of school in general and their definitions of themselves as similar to others in the school it is

difficult to decide whether or not it is their "real" feeling.

Similarly the subjectivity aspect relates to understanding the overall positive self-definitions of students in this study. For example, in light of the importance placed on the social context by theorists of identity, important questions include: How is it, and why is it that these students have developed and continue to maintain such positive identities in view of the negative definitions given by others to the situation they are in? The work experience students studied here have consistently experienced failure and their group membership is viewed as failure and is certainly low in the status hierarchy. As pointed out above the positive aspects of identity of the students in this research is different from students studied in other research. What theoretical construct can be used to explain why these students feel different from other students? From the theoretical orientation adopted in this research one must turn to the relationship of personal identity, labels and situated social identities. What are the situations, circumstances and factors which surround the coincidence of "placements" and "announcements"? When do situated identities become self-definitions and a basis for action? Identity is not just a conglomeration of social identities but is it derived from life experiences which include group membership, social position, status and

interpersonal relationships. Personal and social identities are not just distinct entities but are part of the process of development and change whereby conceptions are learned, used and modified through new experiences. Certainly identity is not necessarily a static structure which can be used to predict behaviour, but it is related to a person's orientation to the social world. As such we must distinguish aspects related to this.

For some students in this study various negative situated identities have become part of the way they define themselves. These situated identities have been accepted and accommodated and yet they do not appear to influence plans of action which seemingly conflict with them. It appears that some of these identities are confined solely to specific situations and might not arise in others even though the identity in question has bearing on, and conflicts with, the identity in the latter situation. But if social identities are related to personal identities, conflicts must be resolved and some sort of consistency maintained. Psychologically, one needs to perceive of oneself as a totality of some sort and maintain a compatible view between various conflicting identities. Precisely how the students in this study cope with conflicting aspects of identity cannot be fully assessed here using the present data base. But it is an interesting question for further research.

In a similar fashion, and related to the above

concerns, is the differentiation of the real identity and the ideal one. Both aspects are equally part of one's personal biography. Which aspects provide meaning to daily routine, plans of action and objects in our environment? Some of the students in this study indicated their desires for their future identities. While it was made clear by some students that they conceived of their desires as a real possibility, others did not expand their ideas to include whether or not their desires were simply an ideal dream. It is an interesting question to what extent one's idealism influences one's present and one's future orientations and the situations that influence idealistic feelings.

Much of what has been said leads to the obvious question of just how critical is the experience of school for student conceptions of themselves and their identities? Do we start with students' overall self-definitions and interpret the meanings assigned to school and various situations in school, or do we start with meanings and definitions and then understand how students view themselves? In order to fully understand and explain student conceptions of themselves we must view not only the school and varying situations, we must look at the society, culture and class membership of these students. While Newfoundland is not an advanced industrial society, it has taken on the trappings of Western industrialized society, especially in the cities. The rural areas, arguably have

not taken on the same version of material prosperity, social institutions, values and lifestyles of industrial society. But their schools generally have. Children who do well in schools and have the same values, beliefs and goals as the school portray are educated out of their communities. There is nothing there for them.

Traditionally in the rural culture of Newfoundland, identities have a strong basis in a relatively stable social context where family, friends, and religion are the basis for affiliation and status. There was no real problems associated with the question of who am I in the minds of these students. Family and community provide many answers. The kind of fragility of identities presented in the literature relates to more complex, segmented societies where relationships, friendships, and family ties are weaker and there is a separation of home, work, and leisure.

Social class membership is also an important variable in an understanding of identity. Different social classes with their different conditions of life come to see the world differently. These ways of viewing the world and their own place in it are at the center of one's identity formation. The significant others in the life of these students are members of the same social class and provide these students with relationships that sustain their reality and identity.

In dealing with the idea of significant others in



the lives of these students one interesting other was seen to be important to them. From all the others in their lives, many of these work experience students mentioned their sisters as the ones who gave the most encouragement, support and direct help. It would be interesting to understand why sisters have assumed such importance to these students. What are the factors in the personal lives and family background of these students that have lead to the relationship between themselves and their sisters? Is it that this relationship exists, not so much because of particular family traits but because of gender roles, and that these sisters have been socialized into accepting responsibility for younger family members, especially in large families, as part of their tradition and culture?

#### Practical Implications

There are two sides to the practical implications of this study: the first is the implications for the school itself and the second is the implications for the work world outside school. Inside the schools personal identity development is an aspect that schools cannot afford to ignore in the teacher-learning process. While there are no objectively defined criteria for allowing students to maintain positive self-definitions and none for determining varying definitions of success and failure, a humanitarian understanding of pupils as people with individual identities

is a necessary approach to the process of education.

Inside school, these students have pointed out the importance of status passages for their identities. The regular grade system in school causes problems to students with its built-in criteria for passing or failing! The area of special education, without the aspect of passing and failing, causes problems because the nature of movement through the system is vague and the ends and means are also often as vague. Within special education classes the criteria for movement depends more on age than anything else, but this is often arbitrarily applied or other factors get in the way. Students in special education classes have enough problems legitimizing themselves without having to cope with arbitrary and unsystematic progression through the classes. There is a need for more systematic research into special education particularly from a self-definitional point of view. The area of special education is riddled with many problems starting with the process of referral and who becomes a member, which is wrapped up with social class, and the whole problem of what is referred to in the literature as "educability". While this aspect is outside the realm of this study, it is certainly of consequence to mention that of the two groups of students interviewed, there are none who could be classified as coming from middle class homes.

Dealing with the special education students them-

selves and their assessment of goals, the in-school students in particular have focused on education as a means to an end. They realize the necessity of formal credentials in order to get a secure job. They also want for themselves an occupation in some skilled trade. They see that the demand for paper credentials of some kind is a necessity for getting into the occupation structure of their choice. The expectations that these students have for themselves might be considered unrealistic in view of the fact that they are classified as special education students and therefore supposedly, have some form of "learning difficulty". On the other hand, in view of their own goals, the amount of work they are willing to do and achievements made, the possibility of further education should not be cut off. It would seem that students in special education classes should have the opportunity to work in regular classes with the regular curriculum, and obtain as many formal credits as possible in the system. The special education classes in the schools should be flexible enough to allow for this and other teachers in the system made aware of their responsibilities to all students. The students in this study do have that opportunity. As well, their attitudes toward others in school is positive, as they feel that others' attitudes toward them are positive. Similar situations do not exist in all schools however.

Regarding parental expectations for their children

in special education, some of these could be viewed as unrealistic. When parental expectations are ideal and cut off from practical reality it seems obvious that the school has not done its job of informing parents about the placement of their children. If the school has done its work, it obviously has not done it very well. The responsibility of the school is to ensure that regardless of educational level, parents understand the difference between special classes and regular classes. Possibly more research is needed into parental interpretations of school and the factors bearing on these.

School as preparation for life is one of the aims of our educational system. This is a very general kind of educational philosophy, and how it is put in practice in our schools is a different matter. Many of the former students involved in this study stated that they saw no significance to school as preparation for the work world. Those were students who had direct on-the-job experience. Obviously much of the other processes of school lacks relevance for them. The purely utilitarian side of school and education is what seems to have meaning for them. Schools might not and should not necessarily accept student definitions about what should go on in school but their viewpoint is important. Martin (1985) has elaborated on this.

Arising from this study is the role of the school in making provisions for students in the status passage from school to work. What information is available to students

regarding the world of work? Many schools in Newfoundland do not have a guidance person available to them or anyone other than the regular classroom teacher to provide the necessary information. The limited resources of most schools and the competition with more relevant academic structures makes school provision for direct help almost impossible in many situations. The possibility of the creation of other agencies to assist students and former students along these lines should be given some thought.

The former students in this study were employed in low-level jobs which were of a sporadic nature and interspersed with periods of unemployment insurance benefits. These students generally expressed satisfaction with their jobs and their lifestyles. Nevertheless, it seems that unemployment insurance has become a way of life for these individuals and many do not conceive of any way of life outside this. The design of government programs to these rural areas, such as local initiative programs, foster such attitudes rather than offer any alternative. Government social policy regarding areas of high unemployment needs not only research, as there has been enough carried out, it needs to take action. There are no provisions made for young people in these areas, only an opportunity to work for ten weeks and then draw unemployment. The problems associated with such a situation are obviously manifold. Short-term band-aid approaches

offered over such a period of time are not solutions and only aggravate the situation by promoting and sustaining attitudes and ways of life that become increasingly more difficult to address.

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APPENDIX A

Appendix A  
Demographic Information

Please give the following information.

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Place of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Community you live in: \_\_\_\_\_

Community clubs, associations, etc. you are involved in:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Number of children in your family: \_\_\_\_\_

Your position in the family: \_\_\_\_\_

The number of children at home now: \_\_\_\_\_

The number who have finished school: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupations of brothers and sisters: \_\_\_\_\_

Father's occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Mother's occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Father's place of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Mother's place of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Father's Education: \_\_\_\_\_

Mother's Education: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX B

## Appendix B

## Questionnaire To In-School Work Experience Students

Please respond to the following questions:

1. Why do you think you are in work experience class?

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2. Do you like being in this class? Why or why not?

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3. What do you enjoy most about it?

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4. What do you dislike about it?

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5. Do you feel you are different than other students in this school? Explain.

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6. What subjects do you dislike in school? Explain why you dislike them.

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7. What subjects do you like in school? Why do you like them?

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8. What activities do you enjoy most in school? What ones do you enjoy least? Why?

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9. Do you work hard in school?

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10. Why are you staying in school?

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11. Overall, do you like or dislike school?

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12. Did you fail any grades in school? How did you feel about that?

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13. How do you <sup>o</sup>feel now?

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APPENDIX C

## Appendix C

Who Others Think I Am  
Questionnaire to: In-School Work Experience Students

Please respond to the following:

1. My best friend thinks I am \_\_\_\_\_
  2. My mother thinks I am \_\_\_\_\_
  3. My father thinks I am \_\_\_\_\_
  4. My teacher thinks I am \_\_\_\_\_
  5. My homeroom teacher thinks I am \_\_\_\_\_
  6. My students in my class think I am \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX D

## Appendix D

## Questionnaire Out-of-School Work Experience Students

Please respond to the following questions:

1. Have you worked since you left school? At what?

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2. Are you working now? At what?

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3. Are you happy with the work you are doing? Is there anything else you like to do in the future?

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4. When you were in school did you like or dislike school? Why or why not? Did you always feel the same?

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5. Do you feel differently about school now that you are out?

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6. What subjects did you like in school? Why?

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7. What subjects did you dislike in school? Why?

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8. Do you feel that school prepared you for your present life? Explain how it did or why it did not.

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9. What problems have you faced since you left school?

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10. How did you handle these problems?

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10. How did you handle these problems?

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11. How did you feel about your teachers in school?

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12. How did your teachers treat you?

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13. How do you think your teachers felt about you?

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14. What are your best friends working at?

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16. What sorts of things do you do together?

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17. How did your parents feel about you leaving school?

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18. While you were in school, did you talk to your parents about school and school work?

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19. Did your parents help you with your school work?

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