

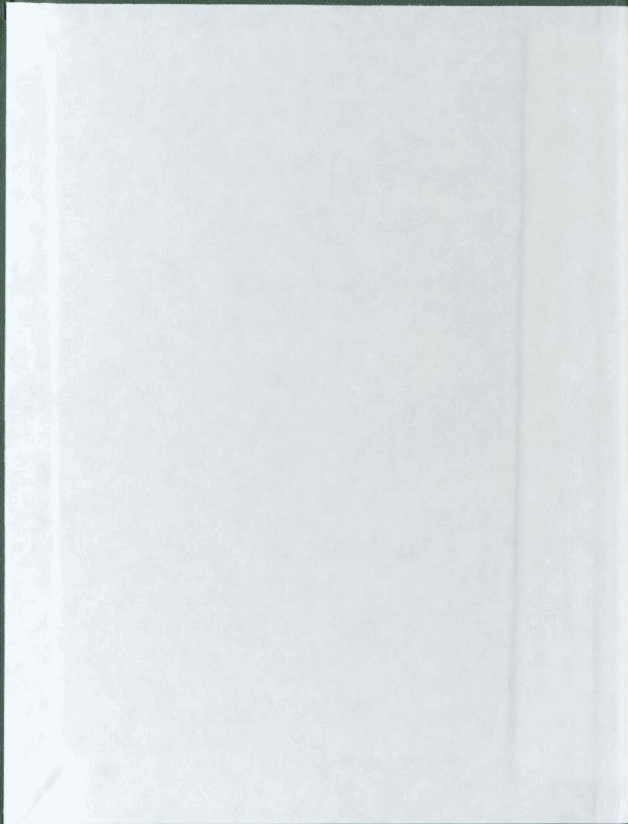
THE PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTS WHOSE CHILDREN
HAVE ATTENDED SCHOOLS NATIONALLY AND
INTERNATIONALLY REGARDING THE "QUALITY" OF
NEWFOUNDLAND'S EDUCATION SYSTEM AND THE
PROVINCIAL EDUCATION REFORM DOCUMENTS:
A MISMATCH OF PERCEPTIONS

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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The Perceptions of Parents Whose Children Have Attended Schools Nationally and Internationally Regarding the “Quality” of Newfoundland’s Education System and the Provincial Education Reform Documents: A Mismatch of Perceptions

By

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Abstract

This research obtained the perspectives of parents whose children have attended schools nationally and internationally as well as locally regarding the overall “quality” of the education system in Newfoundland, as they have experienced it. The data revealed that parents whose children have attended schools nationally and internationally as well as locally judge the provincial education system positively overall. The research participants like local education because it has a well-rounded and broad curriculum. This parental subgroup also judges local schools favorably because they feel the provincial education system their children have experienced possesses some of the attributes of quality education that are not measurable on standardized test scores. For example, this parental subgroup evaluates local education highly in their children’s schools due to the following: high degree of parental involvement; good home and school communications; effective teachers; visible and involved school administrators; and positive school atmosphere. Furthermore, this research discovered that some of the phenomena the research participants believe to be evident in local education are also the same components of schooling they feel reflect quality education generally.

The research participants’ perceptions of the quality of local education are different from the perceptions of some aspects of local education presented in many education reform documents recently published in this province. This difference exists in part because this parental subgroup and the reform documents use different criteria to assess the quality of an education system. The local education reform documents use standardized test scores as the main barometer of educational achievement whereas this parental subgroup avails of additional attributes of

education when evaluating the effectiveness of an education system.

The parental subgroup in this research judges the following areas of the local school curriculum highly: music; physical education; language arts; and special education. Even though the research participants were generally pleased with the quality of local education in the schools their children have attended, they identified specific areas of weaknesses. The weaknesses are student discipline and the following curriculum areas: mathematics; science; fine arts; and multiculturalism.

When providing their personal perspectives on the quality of local education and the attributes of quality education in general, this parental subgroup revealed that educational values are very individualistic. This may have negative implications for the level of parental satisfaction with the quality of local education in the future. For example, this parental subgroup favors a broad curriculum and the teaching of the arts and humanities in schools. Parents in this province, who value these components of a school curriculum may not be happy with provincial education in future because the reform documents appear to be promoting a curriculum that emphasizes the “primary core,” subjects such as math and language arts, at the expense of the arts and humanities, subject areas strongly favored by parents in this research. If we are to maintain, or increase, the present level of parental satisfaction with local education then parental “voice” must be heard and considered when formal judgements on the state of local education and decisions regarding future educational goals and curriculum are made.

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CHAPTER I: THE NATURE OF THE STUDY

Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter introduces the reader to the overall premise of the research. A description of the research purpose as well as the theoretical and practical significance of the study will follow. The chapter concludes with a presentation of the limitations of the *study and definition of terms*.

Introduction to the Study

Since 1985, most of the reports on education in Newfoundland have been critical of the education system in this province (Singh, 1990a). The Royal Commission of Inquiry reports entitled *Our Children Our Future* (1992) and *Adjusting the Course* (1993, 1994) provided formal support to the provincial government's claims that Newfoundland's education system is not achieving desirable academic outcomes, and is in need of fundamental transformation. These government-sponsored reports concluded that education reforms are necessary because students in Newfoundland perform at a lower standard than students in the rest of the country (Arruda, 1997).

Lawton (1996) stated that many business philosophies are derived from the world of business - a world of profits, products and customers. Education, in contrast, is a world

of ideas, students, teachers, and learning. Holt (1993, 1995) and Schlechty (1997) believe that the traditional notion of “customer” does not exist in education. The idea of a customer is essential to business, but seems futile in education, since the student is manifestly the beneficiary of schooling. However, literature by McCann (1994, 1995) and Arruda (1997) found that the negative sentiments on the part of some key elected officials, government bureaucrats and professionals regarding the “quality” of local education are apparently connected to the outlook of the local business community. Holt (1993) reminded us that an attempt to link business and schooling should be treated critically since they often *presage a shift away from the purpose* of education - the development of mind and body - toward the tasks of training and the inculcation of skills.

When one analyses the current state of local education, this turn of the century prediction about the consequences of business interference in education has a remarkably modern ring:

The responsibility for changing existing conditions so as to make it possible for the public schools to do its work rests with the people, the whole people. Any attempt on the part of the public to evade or shift this responsibility must *result in* weakening the public sense of curriculum responsibility and capacity for curriculum duty besides further isolating the public schools from the people, to the detriment of both (Haley, 1981, p.290).

Willie (1987) stated that there are many critics of the notion of business dictating the goals of education. He also reminded us that despite the negative picture being painted by some educational policymakers, there is considerable evidence of improvements in the academic achievement levels of students overall during the past few decades. However, many policymakers who are critical of education have chosen not to acknowledge these improvements. After having closely scrutinized local newspapers, particularly The Telegram, I have concluded that *many of this province's schools and students perform highly in some curriculum areas. For example, the high number of students winning prestigious national scholarships and past performances by local school choirs and bands makes one question the truth of the notion that local schools are generally performing poorly.*

Since the start of my teaching career parents have told me they are generally pleased with the quality of local education. Parental comments regarding Newfoundland's education system and the views evident in the provincial education reform documents have intrigued me for many years. This fascination has led to my desire to discover the perceptions of parents whose children have attended schools nationally and internationally as well as locally regarding the quality of Newfoundland's education system. Below are some of the parental comments that led to my becoming fascinated with this research topic. (None of these comments was made by the research participants. Instead, they were made by parents I encountered before proposing the research topic.)

- Norwegian parent whose two children were in grades two and four: "My children are not prepared for the academic demands and standards required at School I, locally."
- A parent from Edmonton whose son was in grade four: "A lot more is demanded of the students here than back home. My son was considered a good reader back in Edmonton but here he's behind his classmates. I can tell by looking at his selection of library books and recreational reading materials versus those of his friends."
- A Scottish parent whose boys were in grades nine, four and two: "We paid dearly to send our sons to an exclusive boarding school and they did not get nearly as good an education there as you are providing here and, for free."
- A parent from England, whose children were in grades two and three: "We had our children in a private school in England but *after seeing the good education they are getting here*, in comparison to what we received back home, we won't waste *money on a poorer quality education when we return to England*. Instead we will just put them in the public system and save our money."
- A parent from Denmark, whose three boys were in local junior and senior high schools: "We have lived all over the world and the teachers and students here are the most warm, welcoming, and accepting we have ever encountered."
- A native Newfoundlander whose daughter was then attending Memorial

University: "We were away in Calgary for four years and when we returned to Newfoundland she was behind her classmates here. When she left Newfoundland at the end of grade four, she had been at the top of her class."

A parent from Ontario whose children were in junior and senior high schools: "Your schools are weak as there are not a lot of hands on activities but your art and music programs are top notch - way ahead of Ontario's programs in these areas."

I was also intrigued by local literature by Flowers (1984), Graesser (1988), Hardiman (1993), Lane (1980), May (1980), Warren (1983) and Waye (1974) that indicated that the local populace has generally assessed this province's education system favourably. Arruda (1997) claims that the level of parental satisfaction with the *performance of schools* was high at the start of the education reform process despite the government's claim that the provincial education system is not making the grade. According to the document *Our Children, Our Future* (1992, p. 588) schools are well-regarded locally as 82 percent of respondents rated local schools with either an "A" or a "B" in 1991, an overall increase from 74 percent in 1986. Significantly, the generous marks were highest among respondents with children in school, with 87 percent giving a grade of "A" or "B." Raty (1996) and Schlechty (1997) contend that these positive parental attitudes and perceptions are not unusual as parents are inclined to rate local schools favourably because their knowledge of schools is derived from personal

experience rather than from the media and other institutions in society.

Clearly, some of Newfoundland's elected officials and government bureaucrats' notion that the local education system is below standard does not seem to have been supported by the local populace. This research intends to reveal whether or not the government's negative analysis of local educational outcomes, as outlined in some of its education reform documents, is supported by parents whose children have attended schools nationally and internationally as well as locally. To accomplish this, I will first attempt to discover and describe the participants' perceptions regarding the quality of the local education system based on their experiences both outside Newfoundland and in this province. Second, I will examine whether or not this parental subgroup's perceptions support or oppose the views of local education outlined by the authors of the provincial education reform documents. Finally, when judging this province's education system, I hope that this parental subgroup's "voice" will also provide insight into the aspects of education they value as reflective of quality education. If, as some sources maintain, parental opinion is an important indicator of effective education (Michigan Department of Evaluation Services, 1996; Schlechty, 1997; Stewin & McCann, 1993), then this group's voice, and the voice of parents generally, must be considered when pronouncements are made on the state of the provincial education system, and when making decisions on curriculum content and educational goals. After all, today's parents are capturing headlines as they become more vociferous about schools and more politically active in educational decisions.

Research Purpose

The research purpose is, first and foremost, to discover and describe the perceptions of parents whose children have attended schools both nationally and internationally regarding the quality of this province's education system, based on their local, national and international experiences. When judging the provincial system, I believe this parental subgroup may also provide descriptions of the criteria they feel reflect quality education. The perceptions of this small subgroup of parents regarding the quality of local education, as they have experienced it, may either be different from, or similar to, the perceptions outlined in the provincial education reform documents. An attempt will then be made to account for these differences or similarities.

While this research is "localized" and involves only a very select group of parents, *hopefully it will contribute to an overall picture of the quality of some aspects of education in Newfoundland, as well as what constitutes parental educational values for a particular subgroup in this province.* To the best of my knowledge, little previous local research has addressed the goals of this study. Furthermore, an apparent gap exists in the formal literature on parental educational values and expectations of schooling in general.

Significance of the Study

I began this research with the following concerns. Some of the provincial

government's negative perceptions regarding the provincial education system manifest themselves in many education reform documents. This negative outlook may have caused *feelings of inferiority, low self-esteem, low morale and apathy among teachers, students, and some parents.* It may also have left a segment of the general populace questioning some local educational initiatives, many aspects of Newfoundland's education system, and the abilities of many provincial students and teachers. However, the researcher's past experiences with parents whose children have attended schools both nationally and *internationally as well as locally* indicate that the research problem may identify a small parental subgroup which possesses views that present a more positive picture of some, or even many, aspects of the province's educational system, as they have experienced it.

In addition to the perspectives of this parental subgroup on the quality of local education, this research aims to illustrate, from a theoretical perspective, the educational *criteria that some parents value when deciding some aspects* of what constitutes quality education. The study may support the provincial government's present policy of using standardized test scores as the main indicator of educational performance. However, this research may give voice to the significance of using other criteria to measure quality education. For example, the data may reveal that some parents value educational phenomena such as *a positive school atmosphere and parental involvement.* If this is the case, then parents of children having attended schools nationally and internationally may reveal that this province offers some programs, and promotes many educational approaches and philosophies, that are valued by some subgroups and segments of society.

On a more practical level, obtaining some positive views of Newfoundland's education system may foster a sense of pride, and feelings of self-esteem, confidence, and accomplishment among teachers, students and parents. This is especially important as many scholars in the field of education agree that growth in these areas is the foundation for attaining increased educational achievement, the ultimate goal of all education systems (Fowler, 1990; Walker & Soltis, 1986). Obtaining a positive report on the provincial education system, at least in certain domains, is needed now more than ever before, especially in light of the current crisis and division within the education system.

It is important to examine the perceptions of parents whose children have attended schools both nationally and internationally as this subgroup's views have not yet been considered. Also, they have had dual or multiple experiences with educational systems, both in this province and elsewhere, and are thus in a position to critically analyse the local system. In contrast, it is much more difficult for the local population to assess the overall quality of education as their knowledge, while important, is based on their limited local experiences and daily interactions with the local populace. Thus, "outsiders'" perceptions regarding the quality of their local experiences could provide a comparative perspective and the opportunity to gauge the reality of some educational processes in this province.

Limitations of the Study

Like all studies, this one has its limitations. The research sample was restricted to a

parental subgroup of twelve newly arrived parents at six schools in the capital city of St. John's, Newfoundland. It may have been beneficial to involve additional schools and parents but the contingencies of time and accessibility did not make *this a practical option*. It is recognized that because this study was conducted among a limited number of participants, meeting very restrictive criteria, in a limited number of schools, its conclusions are *only applicable within the limits of these schools* and for this parental population. The results cannot be interpreted as being representative of the overall picture of education in Newfoundland or as representing the views of all parents in this province.

Definition of Terms

The "participants" in this research project are parents whose children have attended schools nationally and internationally, and are presently attending schools in this province. The term "parents" refers to adults who currently have children in the school system or adults who have responsibility for raising those children. The following is a list of some of the terms that may refer to this particular subgroup of parents: "newcomers," "recently transferred into," "parental subgroup," "parents from away," "new parents," and "recently arrived."

In the literature, "extracurricular activities" refer to band, music, physical education, and similar activities. For the time being, many of these activities are considered part of the regular curriculum in this province. Thus, when I refer to

extracurricular activities in the local context, I will be referring to lunch time and after school activities such as intramural sports, basketball, chess clubs, computer clubs, and the like.

When I refer to the “education reform documents” in this research I am referring to documents produced, or endorsed, by the local business community and the provincial government. I have subsumed the agendas of both the business community and provincial government under the category of education reform documents because McCann (1995) claims that the position of these two groups, regarding the relationship between the local economy and education, are remarkably similar.

This document will repeatedly refer to terms such as “local education,” “provincial education,” “*education in this province*,” and the like. In all cases, I will be referring to only those specific local schools the participants experienced. In no way are these terms to be interpreted as representative of provincial education or provincial educational phenomena in general. Also, when discussing their educational experiences, the research participants focused on the primary, elementary and junior high schools as the majority of their children were registered in these grade levels at the time of my research. The five participants who had children in senior high schools in this province did occasionally refer to their experiences at that level. However, the main focus of their discussions was on the local primary, elementary and junior high schools they had experienced in this province.

Chapter II will present an extensive review of the wide range of literature relevant to the emerging themes in this research document.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter will begin by reviewing the education reform documents produced, or endorsed, by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. This will be followed by a review of current literature in the following areas: human capital theory, critiques of the human capital theory, parents in education, and standardized testing. The literature discussion will also focus on curriculum, and the following specific areas of curriculum: academics, humanities, fine arts, music, social studies, French, physical education, special education, multiculturalism, and religion, ethics and values. This chapter will then examine literature on school's purpose and effective schools. A literature review will also be made of the following components of effective schools: parental involvement, school atmosphere, effective administration, effective teachers, and home and school communications. This chapter will conclude by reviewing current literature on student discipline and school choice.

Provincial Education Reform Documents

Literature indicates that the recent wave of educational policy advocating reforms in the United States, the United Kingdom, the Scandinavian countries, Canada, and in

Newfoundland, during the past ten years, appears to be introducing a market orientation to education. Canning (1993) reminds us that the education reform documents imply that local politicians and the business community seem to have been swayed by remote calls for business to take the lead in education reform. Canning (1993) also indicates that locally, government reports on the economy have taken the position that economic failure is a result of the character traits of the workforce and deficiencies in the education system. In addition, McCann (1994) states that a government report entitled *Change and Challenge - A Strategic Economic Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador* (1992) also made the same connection between education and the economy. Furthermore, McCann (1994, 1995) stresses that this educational-economic link has been incorporated into the foundation of Newfoundland's education reform movement in the 1990s.

According to education reform documents, the new ideal in education is to achieve excellence through higher standards and expectations. This will ultimately produce the highly skilled, flexible and adaptable people required for the changing economy. The Education Reform Commission's Report, *Our Children, Our Future* (1992) recommends that the education system focus on the "new basics" curriculum, with emphasis on math, science, technology and language.

Human Capital Theory

Lee Iacocca, past president of Chrysler Motors, defines "better schools" as those

meeting the needs of business (Weiner, 1990). Iacocca views schools' "customers" as industry, not parents, students and community members (Iacocca, 1990; Weiner, 1990). *Local literature states that some provincial political leaders and the business community seem to hold similar views. For example, Arruda (1997) believes that these sentiments, on the part of the business community, have been echoed locally by its spokesman, the St. John's Board of Trade.*

Machlup (1970) argues that the human capital theory which posits that policymakers can ensure that investments in education yield a high human return to society became fully conceived in the 1960s. Salamon (1991) stresses that the human capital theory refers to the acquired skills, knowledge, and capabilities of people, and that by increasing such skills and knowledge, human productivity will increase. Using this perspective, education is conceptualized as the key variable in increasing human capital. It is a form of investment in human beings, *serving to sort and identify individual abilities*, which will be productively utilized and yield economic benefits (Arruda, 1997; Clark, 1991). According to the education reform documents these outcomes can only be attained if the provincial education system focuses on math, science, technology and economic competitiveness.

Critique of the Human Capital Theory

According to Hough (1987), by framing the importance of education reform in

terms of economic resuscitation, educational and political leaders have inadvertently invited those who control economic institutions to direct school improvement and reform efforts. He also argues that this concern over the relationship between education and the economy is neither new nor very original. There is literature which contends that one fundamental problem in making education reform a substitute for policies directly aimed at correcting industrial and economic decline is the thorny task of establishing the correlation between educational attainment of the workforce, industrial productivity, and a society's economic competitiveness. For example, Murnane (1988) cautions that to conclude that the deterioration in America's schools has been a significant cause in the drop in the productivity growth rate is certainly not true. Barlow and Robinson (1994) have levied similar criticisms of the *human capital theory in Canada*.

Although educational achievement is related to labor productivity, an inverse relationship can also exist. For example, the economy's operation can critically dampen the academic achievement of students if they know they have little chance of finding a well-paying job even with a high school diploma. Still other perspectives locate responsibility for declining production and structural unemployment in the overall economic policies and priorities of governments, rather than on factors generally used to explain the causal relationship between education reform and economic revitalization (Weiner, 1990).

Writers from John Dewey (Dewey & Dewey, 1915) to more recent authors such as Barlow and Robinson (1994) and Weiner (1990) have concluded that the corollary to

placing responsibility for economic revitalization on schooling is pinning the blame for poverty on poor education. These authors have challenged this conceptual framework of relating poor economic performance and educational inefficiencies. For example, Eisenberg (1967) succinctly argues that unemployment and poverty are no more caused by education than big feet are caused by big shoes. Others have challenged the causal relationship between educational achievement and economic success so central to local reform efforts. For example, Kazemak (1988) turns the relationship on its head and argues that political, not pedagogical factors, fuel the perception that illiteracy causes poverty, a conclusion supported by studies demonstrating that higher levels of literacy follow improved political and economic conditions. Yet these viewpoints have been virtually absent from public discourse on local education reform efforts. Instead, for the most part, criticisms have been leveled at the mechanics of various plans and not the ideological underpinnings of the movement (Arruda, 1997).

Parents in Education

Parents have a serious interest in the formal education of their children. They have knowledge about their learning style, interests, motivations, problems, and talents. This knowledge is not available to anyone else (Ross, 1994; Sarason, 1995). Parents want their knowledge of their children to be acknowledged and used by others. Parents want to be informed and most of all consulted. They do not want others to be indifferent to what

they think they know (Sarason, 1995; Schlechty, 1997).

Parents are themselves teachers and it is inevitable that they come to conclusions about what is good or bad in education. These generalizations cannot be ignored or rejected. They must be considered as potential assets regarding what education is, or should be, just as it is an asset when an ill person exercises independent judgement to conclude that he or she is receiving proper or improper medical care (Baker & Stevenson, 1990; Ballantine, 1993; Murray, 1995). Finally, in their role as citizens, parents are accountable for what schools are in the sense that they, along with the general populace, provide monies making education possible.

As a result of the literature on the necessity for parental input into education, there is a renewed interest in gauging the attitudes and levels of satisfaction of those individuals who are the primary benefactors of public school systems. For example, the satisfaction of parents is of particular interest since parents are becoming the driving force behind many of the recent trends in education (Tuck, 1995). Thus, Sapon-Shevin (1993) maintains that parental perceptions of everything from school management and academic achievement is critical to all evaluations of educational performance, and all reform efforts. Sapon-Shevin also states that what parents want for their children must also be the community want. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unloving, and if acted upon destroys democracy.

Recent research has begun to give educators some answers to the important question "What do parents want from education?" No educator would be surprised to

learn that parents want schools to educate students and provide places where expert, caring teachers transmit to students a body of proven, tested knowledge that is monitored by fair, objective testing practices (Kay & Roberts, 1994). However, some educators might be surprised to discover that parents want schools to teach more than academics (Baenan, 1995; Evans & Weible, 1982; Isenberg, 1992; Schlechty, 1997; Sconyers, 1996). For example, a major national study in the U. S. in 1993 had 94 percent of the nations' parents listing the goal that combined concern for adult literacy, preparation for the workplace and the development of citizenship capacities, in first place. Surprisingly, the only goal that pinpointed academic competencies specifically came in last (Sconyers, 1996).

Other studies have shown that generally parents in the industrialized world contend that schools should look beyond cognitive skills and should instill values to help children cope in life. For example, some studies have found that 90 percent of parents feel that schools should place major emphasis on punctuality, dependability, and discipline as a means of improving academic achievement (Johnson & Innerwahr, 1994; Sconyers, 1996). Research also illustrates that parents value schooling that emphasizes extracurricular activities. For example, 80 percent of parents polled in 1984 felt that band, music, drama and art were very important as they enhance the development of the whole child. Clearly, parents hold expectations for schools that go beyond traditional concerns (Fowler, 1990; Ryan & Cooper, 1995).

Despite parental knowledge about and interest in education, traditionally only a

few experts and policymakers have participated in the discourse on education in this province (Singh, 1990b). Consequently, it seems that the local education reform documents have incorporated input from only those individuals who occupy top positions in government and various communities and professional organizations (Singh, 1990a; Arruda, 1997). These top level individuals apparently were not satisfied with the education system, and they claimed to have a clear vision and agenda as to the direction toward which education, culture, polity, economics and society in general should move (Singh, 1990a).

However, research in the U.S. indicates that parents do not share the so-called “experts” general alarm over the state of education. Very often the majority of parents have consistently judged their schools above average or excellent, giving them a grade of “A” or “B” (Schlechty, 1997; Sconyers, 1996; Willie, 1987). This is remarkably similar to results found locally. Provincial research indicates that the general populace of this province was satisfied with the education system prior to the reform movement. For example, Warren (1983) found that 82 percent of the population was satisfied with the education system. Graesser (1988) also found that 90 percent of the population was either very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with local education. Similar results have been found in other localized research in this province (Hardiman, 1993; Lane, 1980; May, 1980; Wayne, 1974).

In light of this high approval rating of local education it is not surprising that local parents have challenged various aspects of education reform as envisioned by the official

education reform reports (Mulcahy, 1995). This has nowhere manifested itself more clearly than in the letters by parents to the Evening Telegram over the past year. For example, the recent battle against closure of St. Bonaventure's School in St. John's, which has been fought out in the media as well as the courts, clearly illustrates parental opposition to some components of reform.

Unfortunately, letters to local newspapers, particularly The Telegram, indicate that school boards have often ignored input by parent groups and have apparently sided with the official government educational reform policies. Local research by Lemoine and Treslan (1986), Mulcahy (1995), and Samson (1997) has documented specific provincial cases of parental voice being continually overlooked when educational decisions are made.

Standardized Testing

The local education reform documents appear to be basing its pessimistic outlook of the local education system on standardized testing, their main form of educational assessment (Arruda, 1997). The provincial government is not alone as many other governments throughout the industrialized world use similar criteria to justify education reform. If one looks at Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Scandinavian countries it becomes obvious that it is hardly a novelty for standardized testing and assessment to figure prominently in policymakers' efforts to reform education

(Linn, 1993; Madaus, 1985).

Locally, standardized tests, especially the Canadian Test of Basic Skills (CTBS), have been a prominent feature in education reform documents (Arruda, 1997). For example, in the document *Our Children, Our Future* (1992), raising student achievement is viewed as the major goal of local education as Newfoundland students consistently score below the national median level on the Canadian Test of Basic Skills.

A random sampling of the annual reports from the Minister of Education also indicates the CTBS results are often used as the basic indicator when assessing student achievement. For example, in *Profile '92: Educational Indicators [Primary, Elementary, Secondary]* (1993) and *Profile '93: Educational Indicators [Primary, Elementary, Secondary]* (1994) CTBS score results are referred to when comparing how Newfoundland's students in grades four, six and eight compare nationally. Furthermore, these two specific reports state that the deficit in the performance of local students, most notably on recent Canadian Test of Basic Skills scores, is a cause for major concern. In addition, in *Profile '96: Educational Indicators [Primary, Elementary, Secondary]* (1997) it is stated that while improvements in education are still needed, it is promising to note that the levels of educational achievement and attainment, as noted in the Canadian Test of Basic Skills scores, are improving.

Finally, in the government's report, entitled *Education Statistics*, for the school years 1992-1993, 1993-1994, 1994-1995, 1995-1996, the sections outlining student achievement make repeated reference to Canadian Tests of Basic Skills results. For

example, in the 1992-1993 issue, the results of grade eight CTBS scores for 1989 and 1992 are analyzed. Also, the 1993-1994 issue examines the CTBS scores for grade fours for 1990 and 1993.

The main rationale for standardized assessment in general is the belief that a properly designed assessment system can motivate teachers and students to work harder to enhance learning and ultimately improve educational outcomes. Yet evidence about the actual impact of assessment on students and behavior is *arguably most difficult*, as well as potentially the most important, to obtain (Linn, 1993). In addition, research shows that despite the emphasis on standardized assessment teachers continue to focus primarily on the process of teaching rather than its outcomes (Linn, Baker & Dunbar, 1991). Furthermore, Murphy (1992) argues that educators claim to teach objectives, while instead they teach textbooks, and then almost invariably rate and assess educational outcomes using norm-referenced achievement tests based on neither.

It appears as if there is no unambiguous and straightforward relationship among assessments, curriculum and teaching. In fact, it even seems that narrowly conceived and designed assessments can certainly restrict good teaching (Linn, 1993). Also, it would be a serious mistake to assume that performance-based assessments are somehow immune to problems of bias or adverse impact. For example, we need only to look at the research that suggests that the gap between the performance of under served minority groups and the majority group is even larger on standardized performance-based tests than on traditional ones (Linn, Baker & Dunbar, 1991).

A ten-year study of one hundred and forty schools identified a number of characteristics that distinguished “effective” from “ineffective” schools. Contrary to the provincial government’s stance, the measure of success was not scores on achievement tests, but rather a more holistic view of the outcomes of schooling. Some of the features identified were good communications, student incentives, student discipline, extra curricular activities, belief in the capability of students, an environment of kindness and support, and coherence. *Schools have coherence if they exhibit a similarity of standards and the meshing of many elements* (Ryan & Cooper, 1995; Wynne 1981).

Despite criticisms, educational assessments have served as a monitor of education achievement and a powerful tool of education reform locally. Standardized assessment is central to the current education reform debate as assessment results are relied upon to document the need for change. For example, it was illustrated above when examining government reports and education reform documents, that national and international comparisons of academic performance have been used locally to suggest that this province’s economic decline is due to the failure of the traditional education system. If the literature on the negative aspects of standardized educational assessments is correct, then these formalized educational assessments have been naively expected to serve the role of a kind of impartial barometer of the quality of local education. Unfortunately, such an expectation makes standardized test results valuable to policymakers of every stripe, especially those seeking education reform as a means of overcoming the shortcomings of education (Linn, 1993).

Curriculum

As the issues in society have changed and have become refined, the child-society distinction today has lost the crystalline character it enjoyed in the past. Consequently, education today is studied with a variety of conflicting conceptions of the goals, content, and organization of a curriculum (Eisner & Vallance, 1974). Few people today would disagree with the necessity to learn the basics, and that schools must be accountable for the basic skills of literacy, vocational training and critical thinking (Walker & Soltis, 1986). The following statement from the local education reform document *Adjusting the Course: Part II*, (1994) summarizes the general views on a curriculum in today's society:

There is little dispute over the importance of language, math and science. However, there is less common agreement on subjects such as second language, social studies, music and religion and a variety of other subjects (pp.17-18).

Generally, literature supports this statement. However, Bess and Fisher (1993), Finn, Ravitch and Francher (1984), and Kirk (1991) maintain that curriculum should promote a broad and well-rounded education. These authors see life in the modern context as characterized by wide diversity. They view today's world as a multi-cultural, multi-faith, and multi-ethnic society, in which diversity of lifestyles flourish, and which tolerates and fosters social and individual differences. Schools, according to this view, should

protect diversity and reflect local variety and the features of widely differing peoples. By contrast, a specifically focused curriculum, rigidly dispensed to all, results in a dull uniformity in which vitality and diversity of personal and social experience are homogenized (Kirk, 1991).

Academics

Today, “academics” are generally believed to include the following areas of curriculum: language arts, mathematics, and science. Language arts include the skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening as well as exposure to good literature. Mathematics includes the mastery of basic computational skills, the communication of ideas about numbers and descriptions of the quantitative aspects of ideas and objects, and the ability to apply reasoning strategies and various methods of problem solving. The aim of science in the curriculum is to prepare all students to make informed judgements about all science-based issues such as environmental issues, energy sources, and biotechnology.

According to Dundas (1997), a review of the provincial education reform document *Adjusting the Course: Part II (1994)* indicates that the provincial government believes the primary function of school is academic. In keeping with this general notion the authors of *Our Children, Our Future* (1992) state:

The commission therefore believes that a core curriculum must be established based on the disciplines of language, mathematics, and science, and that high

standards of achievement in these studies must become a primary aim of the curriculum (p.300).

Humanities

In 1983, more than two dozen different study groups, commissions, panels and task forces produced the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education in the U.S. In this document it was posited that education include not just science and mathematics, *but also history, literature, languages, and the arts. Nonetheless, there is the danger that the current interest in science and math might overwhelm the values of the humanities* (Finn, Ravitch & Fancher, 1984).

Humanities include such subjects as history, arts, religion and social science. It has been asserted that the humanities are needed to help educate and give different perspectives to students who are becoming so computer friendly that they are losing the capacity to feel strongly about much of anything except making money (Hoebel, 1993). There is a general agreement that the character of culture, the texture of society, the vigor of polity, the quality of lives, and the quality of education depends at least as strongly on humanities as on the sciences (Finn, Ravitch & Fancher, 1984). If understanding human beings and their interactions is critical to the survival of our planet we must reflect upon the following statement by Combs (1981):

To meet our responsibility in preparing youth for the future, curriculum planning must concentrate far more attention on the human condition (p.270).

If this statement is accurate, education must replace the philistine images in students' minds with visions of music, literature, art, philosophy, history, and languages (Hoebel, 1993). However, as noted by Cantwell (1995) and Dundas (1997), the humanities have been designated "secondary core" in the provincial education reform documents. Furthermore, they claim that there is little reference to this broad curriculum area in the reform documents. Consequently, these two researchers are left pondering the future role, if any, of humanities in the school curriculum.

Arts

Bess and Fisher (1993) maintain that the arts are essential to the well-rounded education of an individual. Students must be prepared not merely for a world of technology but a world elevated by artistic achievements. Fowler (1990) believes that schools must produce students who value morality as much as technology, ethics as much as economics, and artistic beauty as well as economic utility. Rose (1990) believes that the arts provide opportunities for social and cultural interaction and opportunities to produce culture. Furthermore, Fowler (1990) contends that the arts foster cross-cultural

understanding, which is a necessity not a luxury. (Fowler, 1990). John Dewey (1934) wrote that the aesthetic experience is a record of a civilization and, ultimately, a culture's art makes judgement on the quality of life.

The arts can also provide an educational "way through" for many students. Everyone cannot be smart when you have a "single ruler" or even two or three. One way that education should open up the mind and nourish the sensibilities is by cultivating artistic intelligences (Fowler, 1990).

Jalango and Stamp (1997) remind us that the general public sometimes views the arts as mindless, non-academic fare, more related to the hands than the head. Increasingly, however, experts are arguing that the arts are grounded as much in thought as they are in emotion. Carefully planned experiences in the arts result in unique and positive influences on critical aspects of both intellectual and social development. The arts provide an unparalleled opportunity to teach the higher level basics of education: ability to allocate resources; to work successfully with others; to find, analyze and communicate information; to operate increasingly complex systems of seemingly unrelated parts; and, finally, to use technology (Pitkeathly, 1997). It is well documented that if a school has some successful arts program "the life of ... children when they leave school would be immeasurably and most valuably enriched" (Warnock, 1978, p.17).

The arts are child centred, holistic and integrated. For these reasons, aesthetic education makes a major contribution to children's learning. It is argued that education in the fine arts can have a positive effect on academic development. Studies have shown that

children who perform well academically are also best at drawing. This occurs because they are learning to master complex symbol systems (Jalongo & Stamp, 1997).

Dundas (1997) states that in Newfoundland the arts have been generally promoted because music, song, story and dance have traditionally played a vital role in the province's history and culture. However, the future status of the arts is uncertain due to lack of reference to this particular area of curriculum in the recommendations regarding the future direction of provincial education in the education reform documents (Cantwell, 1995).

Music

Fowler (1990) claims that music exposes one to another dimension of being human. Music is a major civilizing force. While it does not necessarily make people moral, it does help one learn to be empathetic toward others. It puts one in touch with the highest achievements of citizens and it teaches craftsmanship. Music is part of what makes people well-educated. There is no replacement for it. Every child should be given access to music not to become a musician but to be better educated.

Bess and Fisher (1993) state that the most common arguments on the part of those advocating music education are: Unlike most subjects which focus on logical-mathematical-linguistic processes in the right-hemisphere of the brain, music involves use of the left side of the brain; to study music is to study the learning process; music is an

academic subject that involves learning in the major domains: cognitive, psychomotor, affective, and kinesthetic; and, participation in music increases the likelihood of success in other academic areas. To study music is to study the basics. Studying music puts one in contact with the other basic curriculum areas: math, science, languages, social studies, and physical education. Participation in music increases the likelihood that students will develop self-esteem, self-discipline, and other positive personal attributes.

Phillips (1993) claims that to study music is to study a basic form of communication. It serves as a means of conveying thoughts, ideas, and feelings among people. Also, to study music is to study the world's people. Music is an important means of learning about and transmitting cultural heritages. Music helps us learn about ourselves, our traditions and our ways of thinking and acting. It also helps us learn about others, their traditions and their behaviors.

Phillips (1993) also contends that music provides a means for developing self-expression, imagination, and creativity. It involves a learning process that moves from convergent to divergent thinking, such as new ways of manipulating, organizing, and structuring sound. Society values problem-solving, and creative activities help in the exploration of numerous possible outcomes to specific problems. Music provides many opportunities for developing this valuable way of thinking which then leads to new ways of doing things.

To study music is to study art. Music gives one a means to develop aesthetic sensitivity. It also teaches one to appreciate quality - those products of human creativity

that represent the highest order of thinking, feeling, and technological achievement. Music is a means of understanding and relating to the noblest desires and aspirations of people throughout the ages (Bess & Fisher, 1993; Phillips, 1993).

Dundas (1997) reminds us that music has held a prominent place in Newfoundland society and culture. She also found that while the quantity and quality of music programs vary from school to school, and district to district, until very recently there has been significant progress in the area of music education provincially. However, according to Cantwell (1995) and Dundas (1997) a review of the educational reform documents leaves one questioning the future role of music in the curriculum as music has been designated "secondary core" in these documents. Therefore, the future of music education, like all other curriculum areas under the arts and humanities, is uncertain at best.

Social Studies

Two major approaches define social studies as either social sciences simplified and adapted for pedagogical reasons or that portion of the curriculum which is focused specifically on citizenship education (Shaver, 1986). Bennett (1984) presents the following fundamental arguments for the inclusion of social studies in a school curriculum: Students should be exposed to social studies so that they will be able to find their place within the larger social and cultural structure; and studying social studies enables students to understand the broad sweep of both ancient and contemporary ideas that have shaped our

world. The two recent provincial social studies guides highlight the two important goals of social studies as being personal development and socialization, and growth in citizenship.

In Newfoundland social studies has traditionally been part of the curriculum at all grade levels. However, since the 1990s there seems to have been a downgrading of social studies by significant others (McCarthy, 1992). For example, when the senior high curriculum was reorganized in 1980-1981, social studies was given a prominent place in the curriculum as students were required to complete a minimum of six social studies credits compared to the requirements of two credits each in math and science. But with pressure this has changed as the *Task Force on Mathematics and Science Education* (1989) stated:

The public does not see all school education to be of equal value. Areas such as language, mathematics and science are to be of higher priority than other areas (p.41).

Consequently, students now need only four credits in social science to graduate high school as compared to four credits each in mathematics and science and four credits in mathematics and/or science and/or technology (*Program of Studies: Kindergarten, Primary, Elementary, Intermediate Senior High: 1998-1999*).

In addition to the senior high level, the *Report of the Junior High Reorganization Committee (1986)* indirectly suggested a downgrading of social studies as it recommended

that this curriculum area should receive 9.6 percent of time allotment compared to the 10 percent it held earlier. Finally, in the provincial educational reform documents, social studies has received the designation “secondary core” implying a lowering in status within the Newfoundland curriculum (Cantwell 1995; Dundas, 1997).

Second Languages

Numerous studies show that the study of second languages in schools is booming (Ryan & Cooper, 1995). Gossen (1994) maintains that exposure to a second language in school constitutes an important part of a forward-looking, up-to-date educational system. Also, learning a second language has positive social and economic benefits.

In 1969 the Canadian government legislated the Official Languages Act. Since that time bilingualism has become a much debated topic (Hooper, 1993). But regardless of the arguments both for and against learning a second language, parents have asked for school French programs that graduate students with a sound knowledge of, or fluency in, a second language. These developments have created a heightened awareness of French as an integral part of the Canadian school curriculum.

According to the Department of Education's *Program of Studies* (1998-1999) children in Newfoundland are offered a core French program starting in grade four and continuing through until graduation from senior high school. However, schools that meet the department's specific criteria may offer core French from grades one to three.

Furthermore, many schools in this province offer early and late French Immersion programs.

Local research indicated that in some regions of this province 20.3 percent of respondents were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the French courses offered in schools. Furthermore, only 40 percent of parents surveyed were satisfied with local French Immersion programs (Hardiman, 1993).

In the education reform documents, French has been given the status of secondary core (*Our Children, Our Future*; 1992). However, in the *Program of Studies: 1998-1999* it has been allotted slightly more time than some of the other so-called secondary core areas of curriculum. As is the case with most of the other secondary core curriculum areas, the provincial education reform documents do not issue a firm statement on the future role, or overall status, of core French or French Immersion programs within this province.

Religion, Ethics and Values

Risinger (1993) argues that one aim of education is to broaden and deepen a student's knowledge and grasp of human behaviour and history in general and in our society particularly. He states that some writers argue that it is impossible to do so without the understanding of the role of religions. Risinger (1993) also claims that it is essential that students be taught about religion in human affairs because many situations

throughout the world require an understanding of religious ideas and their impact upon history and contemporary thought. He maintains that concepts such as nationalism, freedom of conscience, anti-colonialism, capitalism, and environmentalism are inextricably tied to religion. Etzioni (1993) claims that the heart of some schools' problems is the failure to address some of the issues of character and the formation of ethical values. Furthermore, Fowler (1990) states that moral education is necessary as it determines how we use our intelligence.

Traditionally the churches controlled Newfoundland's education system. Specific Christian denominations were permitted to establish their own schools and to teach their religious doctrines along with the provincially prescribed curriculum. Past surveys indicated that approximately 60 percent of the Newfoundland population wanted to change from the denominational schooling system to one which is nondenominational (*Our Children, Our Future*, 1992, p. 600). This was confirmed September, 1997 when the people in this province voted to eliminate the traditional denominational education system. However, polls indicate that 77 percent of the local populace want to see the teaching of religion retained in schools (Graesser, 1988). A 1986 poll by the CBC program *On Camera* found similar results (Graesser, 1992).

With recent education reform the churches no longer have any input into Newfoundland's educational system. The Department of Education is in the process of developing a new religious education program that will have a general Christian focus rather than promoting the doctrines of specific denominations as was the practice in the

past. If letters to The Telegram over the last few years are any indication, many fear that some of the provisions relating to the teaching of religion in schools are so vague that the future role of religion in the school curriculum of this province is very uncertain.

Multiculturalism

Canada is now a pluralistic society. Consequently, “multiculturalism” is another area that has emerged in importance in the school curriculum. In 1971 the House of Commons announced a multiculturalism policy which officially recognized this country’s status as a multicultural society (Wood, 1989). It was enshrined in the 1982 *Constitution Act* as part of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. However, these political formalities have not had a direct impact on education in many Canadian provinces even though multicultural education has an important role to play in the realization of multicultural ideals (Alladin, 1992).

A “multicultural curriculum” refers to teaching history and literature, among other subjects, in ways that accurately reflect the different cultural strands in our society and world (Ballantine, 1993; Ravitch, 1990). In a society that defines itself as democratic and egalitarian, a multicultural education policy seeks to foster equality between groups and open access to schools (Alladin, 1992). Ryan and Cooper (1995) state that a multicultural curriculum is considered one of the key ways of achieving a society in which cultural differences are understood and appreciated.

The multicultural education policy for Newfoundland is an official commitment to multicultural education. It states that the spirit of multiculturalism should permeate the underlying curriculum philosophy, the curriculum materials and the interactional and pedagogical contexts of education in schools. After examining the provincial policy, Connors-Stack (1995) concludes that the specifics of the policy fall short of the ideals promoted in other visions of multicultural education. For example, an examination of specific courses, such as the grade nine literature materials prescribed by the Department of Education, illustrates that these materials are not permeated by the spirit of multiculturalism and the multicultural nature of Canada. A survey of the course of study in provincial schools reveals that multi-culturally related topics or areas of study are offered. However, there remains a need to relate these courses and studies more directly and specifically to the concerns of multiculturalism and multicultural education (Magsino & Singh, 1986).

The role and importance of multiculturalism in Newfoundland's education system is not likely to change in the immediate future as the educational reform documents *Our Children, Our Future* (1992) and *Adjusting the Course, Part II* (1994) do not give specific mention to any component of multicultural education.

Physical Education

The benefits of physical education in the curriculum are numerous and varied.

Sports sociology literature reveals a positive relationship between participation in sports and educational attainment (Hands & Eckland, 1976; Snyder & Spreitzer, 1973; White & McTeer, 1990). Physical education can contribute to one's personal and social education (McNamee, 1990). It is associated with happiness, vigor, the full employment of capabilities, freedom of conflict within oneself, and a harmonious adjustment to the environment (Arnold, 1991). Physical education involves development of self-esteem and self-confidence, developing strong moral and ethical principles, understanding social conventions, and developing social, communication, and decision-making skills (Williams, Williams, Bertram & McCormack, 1993). Team games also have a particular role in developing qualities of co-operation, loyalty, leadership and the enjoyment of competition that are a vital preparation for adult life. Physical education develops functional and expressive movement, and an appreciation of healthy living and of physical fitness (Thomson, 1993).

According to Eastman (1990), speaking on behalf of the Physical Education Special Interest Council, physical education in Newfoundland and Labrador is recognized as an integral part of the education curriculum, but its acceptance has only been a recent phenomenon, influenced in part by government initiative and professional awareness. Yet, in this province, the availability and quality of facilities, equipment and programs varies from school to school, particularly in many rural areas. Many of the problems currently evident could be easily overcome by having physical education teachers in all schools or a physical education consultant for several schools (Melendy, 1985). It is vital that these

inequities in the physical education programs be overcome as a local study by Lane (1980) indicated that parents feel that physical education is a very important part of the school curriculum.

As is the case with most curriculum areas, other than those that have been designated primary core in the education reform documents, the future of physical education in this province is questionable. For example, a government bureaucrat is on the record as saying that the primary function of schools is intellectual development. He appears to view other forms of development such as religious/moral, social/cultural and physical dimensions as secondary and subordinate to the primary core subjects and should be delegated to agencies outside the schools. In a Task Force on Education (1979) report the government official states:

First and foremost, we will emphasize that the function of the school is to promote intellectual development. If a conflict arises between this and other aims, the choice will always be made in favour of this aim. *Second priority will be on the attainment of aims in the social/cultural area.* The reason for this choice is that these aims serve to complement the intellectual aims and it is difficult to identify other agencies that are directly concerned with these aims The choice between physical development and moral/religious development is more difficult to make. Other agencies are concerned with both these areas of development. In the case of moral/religious development both the church and family are directly

involved. Medical and recreational agencies are both concerned with physical development. In the latter case, schools often serve simply as a convenience As long as there is no serious interference with the goals, there is no difficulty in accommodating health or recreational activities in the schools (*Task Force on Education*, 1979, pp. 35-36).

Brockerville (1995) also concluded that because of the political context of educational reform, physical education has become marginalised by powerful decision makers in the educational milieu.

Special Education

Ballantine (1997) states that during the past few decades governments, education departments and school boards have developed laws and policies to ensure that all children with disabilities and special needs are educated in the least restrictive environment possible. The interpretation of these laws and how to carry them out varies greatly. However, these laws and policies have brought to the attention of educators and the general public the importance of considering each child's special needs, and then designing programs suited to them. Various Gallup Polls and surveys of parental opinions and attitudes, indicate that the public supports programs for children with special needs (Isenberg, 1992; Sconyers, 1996).

In Newfoundland, until the 1960s, most students with special needs were in segregated classes or schools. The most significant change in the provincial special education policy occurred in 1987 when the 'Cascade of Services' model was introduced. This philosophy assumed that all children have a right to be educated in the most suitable setting to meet their needs (Canning, 1994).

The 1992 *Special Education Policy Manual* states that it is the responsibility of the provincial Department of Education to ensure that the needs of all students with exceptionalities are met. Furthermore, all special education environments should be part of the total school enterprise. In addition, the policy proposed the "Instruction Cascade" mode which emphasizes making classes educationally diverse and providing the cascade of services to all students in the regular classroom (Canning, 1994).

As is the case with many current education programs and components of curriculum, the future is uncertain for some children currently availing of local special education services. The recently released document *Pathways to Programming and Graduation* (1996) provides guidelines and procedures for planning for students with individual needs. This proposed program is not receiving positive feedback by some groups in this province. The Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers Association is concerned that the current policies and procedures being implemented for special education may have a serious and detrimental effect on the level of instruction provided to all students in this province (Stokes Sullivan, 1999a, 1999b; Callahan, 1999).

Schools' Purpose

Ryan and Cooper (1995) contend that schools are human inventions. People bring schools into being for a particular social purpose. The overall purpose of schools is to achieve the common good and to help people live happy and successful lives. However, if schools are to serve a society, they must keep pace with changes being brought into that society.

There are many views on the purpose of education. One outlook promotes the premise that the purpose of education is to enable pupils to develop with deeper insight those activities which they value or find interesting. From this viewpoint, education systems need to make maximum provision for pupil choice, and for pupils themselves to determine the lines of their own educational development (Kirk, 1991).

We must have schools in which children, in their own way, can satisfy their own curiosity, develop their abilities and talents, and learn of the great variety and richness of life from the adults and children around them (Babin, 1981). According to Dewey (1902), education is both the curriculum and the child. Schools and education bring the child into a meaningful contact with traditional knowledge while honouring the learner's interest and needs (Walker & Soltis, 1986).

Education allows one to perceive meaning in musical tones, in visual stimuli, and in the spoken and written word. In short, education enables one to participate more fully in the human conversation of which all of these are elements. Therefore, education is partly a

process of enculturation into the human family. But education is also a process of socialization, preparing each individual to take an active place in the specific society in which he or she lives. However, an education that enculturates and socializes without imparting critical knowledge does not merit being called an education. Imparting both critical and conventional forms of knowledge is, of course, the main duty schools are expected to fill (McMannon, 1997).

John Goodlad (1994) identified twelve goals that schools are generally expected to assist students to reach: mastery of basic skills, career education, interpersonal relationships, autonomy, citizenship, creativity, self-realization, intellectual development, self-concept, emotional and physical well-being, and moral and ethical character (McMannon, 1997).

The education reform document *Our Children, Our Future* (1992) specifically states that the goal of education in Newfoundland is to see that all students develop to the extent of their ability in five fundamental ways: emotionally; personally; spiritually; and physically and intellectually. However, a closer examination of all the provincial education reform documents indicates that the provincial Department of Education believes that the primary function of school is intellectual (Brockerville, 1995; Dundas, 1997). This is also evident in the fact that there is little mention of the curriculum areas that go beyond mathematics, language arts, and science in the reform documents in this province.

Local research indicates that parents in this province want schools that promote the maintenance of high standards and mastery of the basics but also accommodate the

varied interests and capabilities of students, and offer a wide variety of courses (Lane 1980; Waye, 1974). Other provincial research indicates that parents favour schools that emphasize the following: morals and values; social and personal skills; the ability to live and work with others; health and safety; citizenship skills; and the elements of cultural, religious, and practical vocational tasks (Hardiman, 1993; May 1980; Stockley, 1968).

Effective Schools

No school is “right” or “good” for all students. However, some schools are better than others. That is, some schools provide a significantly better education for a much larger percentage of their students than do others. It is these schools that are referred to in the literature as “effective schools.”

During the past twenty-five years numerous wide-ranging studies have identified the following significant characteristics of effective schools: high expectations for student performance; communication among teachers; the ability to keep students on task; the expenditure of little time on behaviour management; the principal’s leadership; the participation of parents; and the school environment (Blum & Butler, 1984; Brookover, 1981; Chubb, 1988; Edmonds, 1979; Rutter, 1979; Ryan & Cooper, 1995; Walberg, 1990).

Some educational scholars feel it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of schools. The problem is identifying indicators of effectiveness and ways of measuring them.

Dependent variables, such as test scores and dropout rates, are often the indicators used to assess schools' effectiveness. Organizational climate and other internal characteristics such as leadership, communication, and motivational forces are independent variables, and while they are important indicators of the quality of a school, they are often hard to measure (Owens, 1995).

Literature indicates that social and cultural components are the criteria many parents use to gauge educational effectiveness (Cooper & Ryan, 1995; Gilchrist, 1989; Murray, 1995). To the best of my knowledge, very little research in this province has directly addressed parental views regarding the criteria of effective schools. However, some local research lends support to the claim that parents value some of the social and cultural components of local schools. Several studies illustrate that parents believe a good school has good student discipline (Hardiman, 1993; May, 1980; Wayne, 1974). Other research indicates that parents in this province value communication with school administrators and teachers and believe that the school should keep the community well informed as to what is happening within the school community (Hardiman, 1993; Wayne, 1974). Some parents in this province also state that two important features of a good school are good teachers and good teaching methods (Flowers, 1984; Hardiman, 1993). Hardiman (1993) found that local parents consider an effective school as one in which teacher expectations are high. Additional research has found that parents in this province believe effective schools allow for parental involvement (Hardiman, 1993, May, 1980; Stockley, 1968).

Parental Involvement

Fullan (1991) states that parental involvement should be a part of the definition of an effective school. The literature on effective schools indicates that the average level of achievement does not appear to rise unless parents are involved in the school (Epstein & Connors, 1992; Mehan, Hubbard, Villanueva & Lintz, 1996; Henderson, 1988; Ross, 1994). For example, in Michigan, a large scale study of elementary schools and school achievement found that parental involvement in schools significantly correlated with average school achievement statewide (Ross, 1994).

Studies of parental involvement have concluded that besides improvements in academic achievement the following positive outcomes of parental involvement are evident: improved student self-esteem; increased student motivation and behaviour, and enjoyment of school; increased support of teachers; improvement in teacher morale and motivation; increased positive attitudes of parents; and improved involvement of parents in educational activities (Bauch & Goldring, 1995; Collins, 1995; Epstein & Connors, 1992; Ross, 1994).

After reviewing one hundred and seventy-two research studies addressing parental involvement in education, Ross (1994) concluded that there are six sound additional reasons for parental involvement: Parents are responsible for the welfare of their children; involved parents provide better political support and advocacy; early intervention programs that involve parents are more effective; by involving parents the same outcomes

can be achieved at less cost; the benefits of early intervention are better maintained if parents are involved; and parental involvement provides benefits to parents and family members as well as the child.

In this province it is recognized that parents already play a significant role in some schools, and that many schools have utilized innovative strategies to increase parental involvement (Collins, 1995). Local research also indicates that parents want to become involved, not only in traditional activities such as fundraising, but in actual decision making processes (Collins, 1995; Lane, 1980; May, 1980; Stockley, 1968) and to be given voice as to what programs their children are offered (Lane, 1980). The provincial education reform document *Our Children, Our Future* (1992) calls for increased local involvement in educational decision making through the establishment of school councils.

School Atmosphere

Current educational literature emphasizes the importance of a positive school atmosphere, and for the use of school atmosphere as a predictor of school effectiveness (Witcher, 1993). A study of twelve effective schools found that a positive atmosphere, not a school's size, structure, or instructional methodologies, made a school successful (Martz, 1992).

Swymer (1986) claimed that surveys show that American children are not happy with the tone and atmosphere in their schools and that they could achieve more, in better

school situations. Swymer (1986) also claimed that a review of literature on school atmosphere indicates that the time may have arrived for principals to leave their offices and address one of the possible stumbling blocks to success in schools - school tone and atmosphere. A positive atmosphere will better enable educators to spend more quality time on instruction and less on things such as discipline. Research has clearly identified that a school's atmosphere has a direct impact upon how students perform (Brookover & Schneider, 1975; Murray, 1995; Tesh, 1992; Ziagarmi, 1981).

To the best of my knowledge there does not appear to be much local research addressing the issue of school atmosphere in this province. In the *Report to The Social Policy Committee of the Provincial Cabinet (1995)*, the Classroom Issues Committee stated that if a school is to experience a positive school climate good student discipline is essential. However, some local literature implies that student discipline may be in need of some improvement in this province (*Classroom Issues Committee, 1995; Hardiman, 1993; Our Children, Our Future, 1992; Warren, 1983; Wayne, 1974*). If these two statements are valid, then the atmosphere of local schools may be questionable.

Effective Administrators

Hartwig and Ruesch (1994) contend that administrators have a significant impact on student and teacher behaviours, attitudes, and performance. Research illustrates that at the centre of strong schools are capable, involved, accessible, and visible principals. Thus,

the priority of administrators should be directed at being visible and involved (Batsis, 1987; Bingham, 1986; Swymer, 1986). Principals must know what is going on in the classrooms because teachers who are effective are proud of their abilities. Staff morale greatly improves when the principal is seen frequently throughout the building. This allows for impromptu mini-conferences that help principals deal with concerns and to prevent problems. A visible principal creates a strong rapport with his or her students. This lets them know who is in charge, and by being in the right place at the right time, prevents many problems. Impromptu encounters during the day can allow the principal to reinforce proper tone and learning atmosphere (Swymer, 1986).

A review of local literature indicates that very little direct research has been completed on the quality of this province's school administrators. However, some general research on the overall quality of provincial education indicates that parents are satisfied with the quality of leadership on the part of local school administrators they have encountered (Hardiman, 1993; Waye, 1974).

Effective Teachers

People are influenced primarily by those toward whom they have a positive attitude. In classrooms it is essential that the student, in order to accomplish the desired learning, have a positive regard for the teacher (Hurt, Scott & McCroskey, 1978; Short, Short & Blanton, 1994). In their dealings with parents and students, Carl Rogers (1969)

advises teachers to be real or genuine, value other persons as worthy in their own right, and to show empathy.

In a study in Pittsburgh, it was found that it is not “professionalism” parents want from teachers but rather the “personal touch.” Parents report that a personal touch is the most enhancing factor in teacher/parent relations. Teachers who take a personal interest in children and call parents to alert them to problems, both academic and social, were highly rated by parents. Teachers do not earn the respect of parents by adhering to a cold businesslike approach (Lindle, 1989). Additional research has found that teacher interactional patterns have an influential effect upon students (Brophy & Good, 1973). Observers in effective schools describe the classrooms and teachers as friendlier and more pleasant (Berliner, 1989).

Local research illustrates that parents see teachers as a very important component of the school organization. Parents are pleased when a healthy relationship exists between teachers and children (Lane, 1980). Other local research suggests that a good relationship with teachers is essential if students are to do well in school (Hartery, 1983; Martin, 1985; O'Reilly, 1988). Some literature indicates that most parents in this province have a positive attitude toward teachers in their school district (Flowers, 1984; Hardiman, 1993; May, 1980; Warren, 1983; Waye, 1974). For example, May (1980) found that parents believed that local teachers are competent in their field and have the skills to diagnose student problems. Warren (1983) reported that over half the respondents in a provincial survey chose teachers as the best feature of the local schools they had encountered.

Home and School Communications

Ames (1995), Denbo (1983), and Gilchrist (1989) state that effective schools have constant communication between the school and the home. A study by Ames (1995) found that parents' overall evaluation of the teacher, their sense of comfort with the school, and their reported level of involvement were higher when they received frequent and effective communications from their children's school. The findings also suggest that home-school communications seem to be related to the parents' level of comfort with the school and their perceptions of their child as a learner. Furthermore, children's motivation, attitudes toward parental involvement, and perceptions of their parents' level of involvement were more positive when their parents received frequent communications from their teacher and school. Finally, communication between the school and home helps to contribute to a positive school atmosphere, another hallmark of effective schools (Batsis, 1987; Denbo, 1983).

I was unable to locate literature specifically examining the quality and quantity of home and school communications in this province. However, research by Waye (1974) and Hardiman (1993) found that *parents in this province generally believe that the overall level of communication with principals and vice-principals is good.* Hardiman (1993) also found that more than 60 percent of the four hundred respondents in his research were satisfied with the amount of information schools gave parents about their child's progress and the extent to which schools keep the public informed about school activities.

Discipline

According to Short, Short and Blanton (1994) student discipline continues to be the most consistently discussed problem in schools. The word and concept "discipline" is derived from the Latin verb *discipulus* meaning "pupil desire to learn." The business of education is effective learning. Classroom control is considered to be a prerequisite to classroom learning. The task then, is to view student discipline as a system that is part of a larger learning system. Traditionally, the basic philosophy has been that children and youth who are disciplined direct their interests, efforts and abilities toward greater achievement. Those who are not disciplined waste their own individual opportunities and make learning difficult for their classmates. To summarize, Berliner (1989) states that effective schools have fewer discipline problems.

Literature indicates that behavioural problems among students in schools have been consistently identified by the public as a major concern. During the last few years lack of student discipline has been mentioned in the top five concerns in Gallup Polls. In the Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa Poll of the Public's Attitude Toward Public Schools, initiated in 1969, student discipline has been the most frequently mentioned problem. Some studies indicate that parents rate student discipline as high as they rate the quality of the teaching staff and curriculum when giving their perceptions of effective schools (Hartwig & Ruesch, 1994).

Hartwig and Ruesch (1994) maintain that effective student discipline is an

important component of what schools are all about. The significance of what is taught in schools in the area of responsible behaviour has a far reaching impact on society. It is generally assumed, although not often explicitly stated, one of the principal goals of education is to develop a framework to teach self-discipline and social skills to students. In this regard, schools generally perform two sets of functions: attainment of legitimate educational goals; and teaching of social skills.

The Report to the Social Policy Committee of the Provincial Cabinet (1995) by the Classroom Issues Committee identified student discipline in this province as an important area of study. This committee echoed the voice of its Canadian and American counterparts when its members stated that students learn best in environments that are free of disruptive, distracting or potentially harmful behaviours. The Classroom Issues Committee acknowledged that there are many factors contributing to the phenomenon of classroom disruptions in this province. The following are a few of the many contributing factors: unclear policy direction; unscheduled events; uncoordinated implementation strategies; a compartmentalized service delivery system; and inconsistent professional responses.

In the government education reform document *Our Children, Our Future* (1992), the issue of disruptive students and student discipline problems in schools in Newfoundland was acknowledged. Also, local research has reported that parents are concerned about the need for increased student discipline in local schools (Hardiman, 1993; Warren, 1983; Waye, 1974).

School Choice

According to Hallinan (1996) most of the school reforms implemented over the past few decades discarded school practices based on values that are no longer endorsed by a significant part of the population and replaced them with ones consistent with current views on the role of education in society. The most recent example is the school choice movement which reflects deeply held beliefs about freedom and personal rights that many feel has been jeopardized over the past few decades.

Some school reformers and policymakers argue that the public school monopoly stifles the imagination of educators and limits the educational liberty of families (Cookson & Lucks, 1995). The school choice movement covers a variety of policy options, all of which share one common characteristic: Families must be given the option of choosing the school they wish their children to attend rather than being compelled to send them to the neighbourhood school. Public opinion polls generally show that parents are in favour of more choice, although other evidence indicates that there is still a great deal of support for the neighbourhood school (Cookson, 1994; Cookson & Lucks, 1995).

While the empirical evidence regarding the outcomes of school choice is inconclusive (Cookson, 1994; Cookson & Lucks, 1995) many argue that increasing choice means expanding educational opportunities for students without significant additional costs, and that controlled competition can help stimulate system-wide improvements (Bauch & Goldring, 1995; Finn & Rebarber, 1992; Nathan, 1989). Furthermore, it is

suggested that when configurations of education, such as schools, families and churches share a commitment to common values and beliefs, education will be successful (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Coleman, 1987; Coleman, 1990; Cremin, 1976; Goldring & Shapira, 1993).

The market theory suggests that parents who actively choose their children's schools will be more involved in their education than those who do not choose because they make a greater investment of time and energy when making a choice. This greater involvement leads to a sense of "ownership" of the school that psychologically encourages even further parental involvement (Bauch & Goldring, 1995; Cookson & Lucks, 1995; Goldring & Shapira, 1993).

When parents have choice, they can voice their expectations, opinions, and criticisms of a school and if their concerns are not met they can exit completely and choose another school (Bauch & Goldring, 1995; Cookson & Lucks, 1995; Hirschman, 1970; Goldring & Shapira, 1993). Also, this market argument hypothesizes that schools will improve when teachers and administrators meet expectations of consumers because market principles provide incentives for change that democratically organized schools do not (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Cookson & Lucks, 1995).

In Newfoundland the degree of school choice that traditionally existed has been very limited. In smaller communities there was little or no choice at all. In the larger communities one sometimes had a limited choice between sending their children to either a Catholic, Integrated or Pentecostal school, or one of several schools representing a

particular religious persuasion. Traditionally, in Newfoundland, schools were established to serve specific denominations and parishes, or communities. However, in most cases if space was available, a child, regardless of religious affiliation, could attend a given school. Since the late seventies parents in the more densely populated communities have the option of enrolling their children in French Immersion programs. As part of the ongoing education reform efforts local school boards now assign students to the designated “neighbourhood school.” Consequently, school choice is currently more limited than in the past as one no longer has a choice between denominational schools within a community, or even between schools in different communities.

The following chapter will examine the theoretical orientations and methodology of the research presented in this document.

CHAPTER III: THEORETICAL ORIENTATIONS AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter gives an overview of the following: the theoretical orientations of the research, qualitative inquiry and the main tenets of the symbolic interaction theory. The chapter also presents a summarization of the context and sampling procedures, a discussion of other relevant methodological issues, and the data collection process.

Qualitative Inquiry

Since the late 1960s, interpretative inquiry has expanded to include qualitative and ethnographic studies, through which educational happenings are described from the viewpoint of the participants. This research avails of a qualitative approach because I feel this methodology is best suited for the research question and problem previously described, and because qualitative research tends to emphasize the individual aspects of the human experience (Patton, 1980). Like all qualitative research, this study is interactive in so far as the data collection method involves face-to-face interviewing. Thus, it is easily discernable that this study focuses on the participants' point of view, and that my orientation is towards describing and understanding the phenomenon under study. The conceptual base for this study is symbolic interactionism.

Symbolic Interactionism

Theory is a world view, or the way we organize or explain the world we live in. The theoretical model of this research is the interpretive perspective which views meanings as being constructed through the social interactions of people in the setting. One such interpretive paradigm is “symbolic interactionism.” Therefore, the symbolic interactionist theory is used to help inform this study and serve as its conceptual base.

There are many perspectives on education. A “new” sociology of education uses the insights of symbolic interactionism to study educational processes and structures, arguing that an alternative approach is needed to understand educational systems. This theory stresses the need to understand our commonsense views of reality, that is, how we come to the events and situations around us, and react to them as we do. Applied to education, this has taken the form of studying such things as the interaction processes in classrooms and schools, the question of what it means to be “educated,” what should ideally comprise curriculum content, and so forth (Ballantine, 1997; DeMarris & Le Compte, 1995).

Symbolic interactionism rests on three simple premises. The first is that humans act towards things on the basis of the meaning that the things have for them. The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing

with the things he encounters (Blumer, 1969).

The term symbolic interactionism refers to the particular and distinctive character of interaction as it takes place between human beings. The peculiarity is that human beings interpret or “define” each other’s actions instead of merely reacting to each other’s actions. Their “response” is not made directly to the actions of another, but instead is based on the meaning which they attach to such actions. Thus, human interaction is mediated by the use of symbols, by interpretation, or by ascertaining the meaning of one another’s actions (Blumer, 1969; Hogan-Royle, 1997; Roberts, 1991). Symbolic interactionism perceives the social world as one that is best understood through the experiences of the individual actor. In the research setting this includes a mandate for in-depth examination of the social world from the actor’s point of view (Roberts, 1991).

Context and Sampling Procedures

The choice of sampling is based on my special interest in the research topic. As already stated, this study focuses on a particular parental subgroup and their perceptions of the quality of Newfoundland’s education system. Consequently, this study comprising twelve families whose children have attended schools nationally and internationally as well as locally, was undertaken. The children currently attend six schools under the jurisdiction of the Avalon East School Board. The schools were identified because they had a sufficient number of students who had recently transferred to Newfoundland from other

provinces and countries. The research purpose is to discover if my initial hunches about the quality of Newfoundland's educational system made sense.

The research participants' children attend schools in the city of St. John's, Newfoundland. School I is a two-stream school housing students from kindergarten to grade four. School II, also a two-stream school, houses students from grades five to eight. School III is a two-stream school serving students from the kindergarten to grade eight levels. School IV is a kindergarten to grade six, one-stream school. School V is a large three-stream to four-stream school housing students from kindergarten to grade six. School VI is a junior high or intermediate level school containing two streams of French Immersion students and three to four streams of English students per grade level.

Letters, including a description of the research, were forwarded to the principals of schools I, II, III, IV, V, and VI. In these letters principals were requested to get involved in the study. They were specifically asked to distribute parental participation/consent letters and stamped self-addressed envelopes to parents meeting the criteria for involvement in the study. This criteria consisted of parents of children who attended school nationally and/or internationally before enrolling in local schools. (See Appendix B) The specific criteria for inclusion encompassed all of the following: parents who had transferred to this province from another province or country and currently have a child, or children, enrolled in grades two to eight; parents with children who have completed at least six months of schooling locally; and parents who have at least one child who has completed at least two years of schooling nationally or internationally. Thus, the

participants were a small, relatively homogenous group.

Sixty potential research participants were contacted. Thirteen positive responses were received. However, only twelve participants are included as one of the thirteen had to withdraw from the study. This approach, rather than a wide population sampling, was utilized as it should provide the richest data source (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Literature indicates that twelve participants should be sufficient for evidence of emerging themes within qualitative data (Maykut & Morehead, 1994; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Sandelowski, 1995).

While the schools participating in this study served families from many different socioeconomic backgrounds, the twelve research participants were all middle aged, upper middle to upper income, college-educated professionals. Eleven of the twelve families consisted of married couples living in two parent households. In ten of the twelve families the father provided the family income and the mother stayed at home. The average number of children per household was 2.6.

Three of the twelve participants were native Newfoundlanders who had recently returned to the province. These three research participants had children who attended schools in the Northwest Territories, Montreal, Edmonton, Scotland and Morocco prior to returning to Newfoundland. The nine other research participants originated from the United States, England, Scotland and the Canadian provinces of Nova Scotia, Ontario, New Brunswick, Quebec, and Alberta. These nine research participants had only recently transferred to Newfoundland and therefore had only been living in the province for six

months to two and a half years.

While the research participants were a small subset of the total provincial parental group, I believe their perspectives are extremely important because their views on the quality of the local education system are grounded in their “lived experiences,” both locally, nationally and/or internationally. Also, being “newcomers” or having recently returned to the province, this parental subgroup are not under the influence of, or as strongly influenced by, local and traditional “common sense” notions regarding the quality of the local education system. Therefore, they may be able to present a more objective “outsiders” picture of the realities of this province’s education system than parents who have lived in Newfoundland all their lives.

Other Methodological Issues

The data was derived from natural settings or sites. The research participants were given the option of selecting either their home or mine as the interview site. This natural setting allowed me to hear the thoughts and words of this parental subgroup firsthand. Through conversations in this natural setting, the participants’ views regarding the quality of this province’s education system emerged. Also, in this setting many concepts evolved. The participants used these concepts to refine the relevant framework of existing provincial education reform documents from their own perspectives.

My paramount objective is to foster an understanding of the perspectives of

parents whose children have attended school nationally and internationally as well as in Newfoundland on the quality of the provincial education system in a context so that educators, parents, and others reading the descriptions will recognize and relate to them. The research herein is written using the perspective of “voice” (Doyle, 1993; Giroux, 1992). The concept of voice is very important in light of the fact that parents are important participants in the education of their children (Earley & Baker, 1989; Goldring, 1992; Hallinger & Hausman, 1993; Murphy, 1994).

It is highly possible that the perceptions of local education presented by parents whose children attended schools nationally and internationally as well as locally may differ from the picture of the education system painted in the provincial education reform documents. Therefore, I made every effort to remain open to whatever data might be found, and constantly examined and reexamined my own perspectives and biases during data collection. I expanded and continually shifted the locus of the analysis, weighed the data, and checked and rechecked outcomes among the multiple interviews. In this manner I attempted to tackle the issue of potential subjectivity inherent in doing research.

In carrying out this research, I undertook every precaution necessary to protect the participants. For example, permission to conduct the study was initially requested from the Ethics Committee, Faculty of Education, Memorial University (See Appendix A). Once permission was granted to proceed the administrators of Schools I, II, III, IV, V, and VI were informed of all aspects of the study. The administrators were then asked to distribute parental participation/consent letters and stamped self-addressed envelopes to parents

meeting the criteria for involvement in the study (See Appendix B). The letters to parents included the following: an explanation of the research purpose; an outline of the method of collecting the data; the theoretical and practical value of the study; and a request that they grant written permission to be interviewed. The letters of consent informed potential participants of the following: their confidentiality would be protected; their participation in this research was voluntary; and that they had the freedom to withhold any information, or withdraw from the study (See Appendix C). After parents gave their written consent to become part of the research, parental contacts regarding the logistics of the interviews were established through the telephone.

The original research objectives were not modified as the study progressed. However, Subjects A, B, and F had brief follow-up interviews, to address an issue or issues, that were inadvertently overlooked during the initial interview, or to clarify or briefly elaborate upon some earlier response. The interview with Subject L had to be repeated due to auditory difficulties on the first tape.

Data Collection

To recap, the main purpose of this research is to obtain the perspectives of parents whose children have attended schools nationally and internationally as well as locally on the quality of local education. The research also proposes to discover if this parental subgroup's perceptions regarding local education are different from, or similar to, those in

the education reform documents produced in this province. Furthermore, should the perceptions of these two groups differ, I will attempt to discover and explain the origins of this diversity. The final aim of this study is to discover and describe the components of education that this parental subgroup believes reflect quality education. To provide the data needed to gain insight into these research questions, I used multiple one-on-one informal, extensive, open-ended questions, to guide the informal interviews with parents as the participants (See Appendix D).

The interview component of the data collection process was conducted during March and April 1998. The interview date, time and site was selected by the participants as it was felt that the confidentiality and security in sharing an experience would be facilitated if participants chose the setting. At the onset interviewer/interviewee rapport was established. An attitude of acceptance was established by assuring participants that their information, regardless of their views and stance on given issues, was valuable and useful. When searching for insider information, I availed of my own insights, ideas, interpretations and impressions as the key instrument of analysis.

All interviews were taped and then fully transcribed and supplemented with notes and observations. A journal was used to help keep the study focused and to capture unfolding themes. To fully capture the actualities of the participants' experiences care was taken to preserve the actual wording of the interviews when transcribing them. These responses, along with personal reflections and relevant literature, are the main source of text development. Interview content was closely scrutinized for evidence of parental

perceptions regarding the quality of the provincial education system, as well as descriptions of attributes parents appear to value most in education. The data obtained during the interviews were also examined closely for evidence of similarities and, or, differences between this parental subgroup and the provincial education reform documents regarding the perceptions of the quality of local education as well as the criteria used to evaluate education.

Another data source consisted of primary source documents specific to the contemporary education reform movement in Newfoundland, as they provide the best avenue to shed light on the local business community and provincial government's perceptions of local education. First the economic documents preceding the education reform documents were reviewed. These were:

1. *Building on Our Strengths: Report on the Royal Commission on Employment and Unemployment* (1986a)
2. *Building our Strengths: Summary report of the Royal Commission on Employment and Unemployment* (1986b)
3. *Education for Self-Reliance: A Report on Education and Training in Newfoundland* (1986c)
4. *Education and Labour Market Training: Prerequisites to Economic Development in Newfoundland* (1990)
5. *Change and Challenge: A Strategic Economic Plan for Newfoundland and*

Labrador (1992)

6. *Towards a New Economy in Newfoundland and Labrador (1992-1993)*
7. *Status Report on the Implementation of the Strategic Economic Plan (1995)*

Then the education documents that defined the direction of reform were included.

These were:

1. *Our Children, Our Future (1992)*
2. *Adjusting the Course (Part I): Restructuring the School System for Educational Excellence (1993)*
3. *Adjusting the Course (Part II): Improving the Conditions for Learning (1994)*
4. *Structuring the Educational System: A Consultation Paper for Educational Change in Newfoundland and Labrador (1996)*

Government documents profiling the overall state of Newfoundland's education system were also examined. They were:

1. *Education Statistics: Elementary-Secondary (1992-1993, 1993-1994, 1994-1995, 1995-1996)*
2. *Profile: Educational Indicators (1993, 1994, 1996)*

Another locally produced document on education included:

1. *Learning for All: The Foundation Report* (1996)

A selection of local magazines, and newspapers, such as the *Evening Telegram*, were also scrutinized for evidence of the provincial government's perceptions of the quality of the provincial education system.

The following chapter will cover the presentation and analysis of the data.

CHAPTER IV: PRESENTATION AND DATA ANALYSIS (PART I): PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS OF BOTH THE QUALITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND'S EDUCATION SYSTEM AND EFFECTIVE EDUCATION GENERALLY

Introduction to the Chapter

Chapter IV, which constitutes a significant portion of this document, focuses on two of the three primary themes evolving from the data. The first primary theme examines how parents of children who have attended schools nationally and internationally judge Newfoundland's education system. The second primary theme deals with this parental subgroup's perceptions of quality education. In this section on quality education, the following topics will be covered: a broad and well-rounded curriculum, parental involvement, home and school communications, teachers, school administrators, and school atmosphere.

The First Primary Theme: Judging the Local Education System

I set out, first and foremost, to obtain the perspectives of parents whose children have attended school nationally and internationally as well as locally on the quality of the local education system based on their experiences in this province and elsewhere. While all twelve guiding questions set out, either directly or indirectly, to elicit input on this topic,

this section of Chapter IV utilized data obtained from the responses to questions number 1, 7, 8, 11 and 12. Because the responses to these questions varied, the terms around which the responses were organized will be discussed if, and when, needed.

Question Number 1:

Compare for me the school your child (children) now attends with the school (schools) previously attended by talking about some of the following: discipline, home-school communications, attitudes of children toward one another, extra curricular programs and activities, interest level and involvement on the part of administrators, personality and communication style of teachers, parental involvement and so forth.

Question Number 7:

Describe experiences you have had in Newfoundland that make you feel there are some positive things about the local education system.

Question Number 8:

Describe some experiences you have had that have left you feeling that Newfoundland's education system is in need of improvement.

Question Number 11:

As a result of your experiences with education, schools and teachers, how do you feel Newfoundland's education system rates when compared to your experiences elsewhere? Is it better, worse or the same overall?

Question Number 12:

How would you respond to the statement that the overall education system in Newfoundland is inferior to the education system, or systems, your child or children, have experienced in other provinces and countries?

Questions number 11 and 12 were fairly straightforward and up front in the attempt to discover the research participants' perceptions of the local education system. The responses to question number 11 were categorized in terms of whether the

participants believed the quality of the local system is above par, on par, or below par when compared with experiences elsewhere. The responses dealing with the quality of this province's education system were then organized under the following categories: excellent, very good, or good. Question number 11 asked:

As a result of your experiences with education, schools, and teachers, how do you feel Newfoundland's education system rates when compared to your experiences elsewhere? Is it better, worse or the same overall?

When asked this question, seven of the twelve respondents stated that based on their experiences, the local education system is above par when compared to their experiences with public education nationally and internationally. The words of Subject D illustrate this point:

The elementary I'd say is excellent (Kindergarten to grade four). I can't think of anything negative at all about it. I'd say the system here is a little bit better (than in Scotland). The Scottish is also a good system. The (Private) school in England is the same (as here) . . . At that particular (private) school they had an Eleven Plus Exam to determine whether they go to the local grammar school (for the academically inclined) or the comprehensive school. The comprehensive is a school, like Tom, Dick and Harry go there. They (private school) had a very high pass rate at getting kids into the grammar school. The other schools had the Eleven Plus and not many made it to the grammar school. Even though I moan about the junior high, it still got a good system in that respect as the academics (are) excellent.

Five of the twelve respondents stated that education in the schools their children have attended in Newfoundland is on par with their experiences in public schools

elsewhere. The words of Subject I are helpful here:

I would have to say on par (with Nova Scotia). I'd say on par because some things are better here than in Nova Scotia, but some things are better in Nova Scotia than here.

None of the respondents said that local education is generally below par, based on *their experiences in public schools*, both in this province and elsewhere. However, Subjects B and F each related one experience they had with education in private schools *that they considered better than their local educational experiences*. However, these research participants were careful to explain that these positive educational experiences *outside this province were not necessarily a negative reflection on the local situation*. Instead they attributed these positive experiences to the fact that the schools were “private” and at private schools, the parents’ demands were met through “their pockets.” The voice of Subject B illustrates the feelings of these two subjects:

I have had them elsewhere and the only school with higher academic level was actually the private school (Private American school in Morocco) that they went to and that was because the demands of the parents were met out of their pockets. If they (local schools) had the money, we could do every bit as good as they were doing out in that private school.

Subject F (the mother and father team) stated that the standard of Newfoundland’s education system appears to be below that of the Semi-Private French school their children attended in Quebec. (According to the father, in Quebec, a Semi-Private school

means that one has to pay full tuition in order to attend, but the school has to teach the provincially prescribed curriculum). They stated that from their perspective, they believe the Semi-Private French school had a higher academic standard generally because their family basically supports the overall philosophy of French schools. For example, they stated that the French system stresses high achievement in the core subjects, and spends little time on secondary subjects such as music and art (However, when later asked to tell about the positive things regarding local education, Subject F said they liked the emphasis on literature and the arts). They also pointed out that based on their experiences, the local situation is comparable to a very good French Immersion school in Quebec which several of their four children attended. Subject F's words were as follows:

I'd say it (local system) averages out with (School R) which is the French Immersion school (in Montreal) and its parents place fairly high demands (on it). The kids are from (School R), so that is a public (school). The parents, to save money, put their kids in that school until grade four and then switch them over to a \$15 000 a year private school. I'd say School III (here) is equivalent to (School R), the Immersion school in Montreal. That's a very good rating.

While two participants believed that they had private school experiences that were above par when compared to local educational experiences, other participants reported that their past experiences with private schools were on par, or even below par, when compared with the quality of local education their children were receiving. Subjects D's and E's words are helpful here:

The (Private) school in England is the same (as here). . . . They (private school) had a very high pass rate at getting kids into the grammar school, (Subject D).

The school in Scotland was a small private school and it was actually pretty chaotic in that particular school It was even unclear about what time school was over . . . it was hard to compare that school to anywhere else. I'm not sure how well that functioned in hindsight. It seemed to be better for the younger kids than the older ones, (Subject E).

In addition to judging the local education system as better, on par, or below par when compared to experiences elsewhere, the participants also directly or indirectly stated, when answering question number 11, whether they viewed local education as excellent, very good, or good. Again, the results reflect a very positive outlook toward local educational experiences on the part of the parents whose children have attended schools nationally and internationally as well as locally.

As stated earlier, Subject D claimed that based on her experiences in two local schools, the local education system is excellent overall. In Subject D's words:

The elementary I'd say is excellent (Kindergarten to grade four). I can't think of anything negative at all about it Even though I moan about the Junior High it still got a good system in that respect as the academics (are) excellent.

Eight subjects, Subjects A, C, E, H, I, J, K and L claimed the education system they have encountered in local schools is very good overall. Subject C is representative of the views expressed by others:

I'd rate it (education) very good. I'd say it's about the same as Texas.

Two participants, Subjects B and G, claimed that based on their experience, provincial education is good. The words of Subject G illustrate this:

As far as program and that go, our programs in Newfoundland can stack up to the best . . . I kinda think we are somewhere comparable or equal . . . I'd say we rate fairly well.

Finally, as outlined above, Subject F claimed their family's experiences with a Semi-Private French school in Quebec were better than their local educational experiences. However, the father also stated that local education is very good if taken in context and compared to the English system in Quebec. He chooses to make this comparison because he believes that the English system has a philosophy similar to that of the local schools their children have attended. In Subject F's words:

I'd say it (local system) averages out with (School R) which is the French Immersion school (in Montreal) and its parents place fairly high demands (on it) . . . I'd say School III (here) is equivalent to (School R), the Immersion school in Montreal. That's a very good rating.

Question number 12 hoped to gain the overall perspectives of the research participants regarding the quality of local education. The responses to question number 12 were categorized in terms of whether or not their content confirmed or contradicted the participants' responses to question number 11, which asked to judge local education.

Question number 12 was framed as follows:

How would you respond to the statement that the overall education system in Newfoundland is inferior to the education system, or systems, your child or children, have experienced in other provinces and countries?

The responses to this question confirmed the positive general evaluations of local education provided in the responses to question 11. The following comments are representative of the positive responses to question number 12:

No, I wouldn't agree with that. I would say that is a false statement . . . I wouldn't say our system is inferior. I'm happy with the expectations, especially from (School III). I'm happy with the expectations of the children. And I'm happy with their teaching methods, the programs that they offer. My child is getting a good education there I was also really happy in Labrador too even though it was a small multi-grade school. I think they had high standards. A lot have graduated with high marks and good averages They were prepared academically for University. And most did go on to University or College. I was really pleased with that school and if we had stayed there I would have been happy to keep him there until he finished because I knew their success rate, (Subject J).

I'd say you should go there and live and find out. Newfoundland is the same as Ireland, the butt of all jokes. And Goofie Newfie and all that. But on a whole I'd say Newfoundland is pretty good academically. I would not say, from what I'm experiencing, it is any worse than any other areas. From what I've seen they got a good system. I also feel that because you have this, as I say, the butt of all jokes, Newfoundlanders want to achieve and want to prove to the rest of Canada that yaw, we're bright people and we're not the end of all your jokes. We're pretty smart people. You got a good University system here from what I've heard. People come here to study. My father's come over (from Scotland) and he's told us don't bother coming home. He thinks it's great for the kids out here. I think it's great for the kids out here, (Subject D).

As stated earlier, the main objective of this research was to obtain data on the following: the perceptions of parents whose children have attended schools nationally and

internationally as well as locally regarding the quality of local education; the components of education that this parental subgroup believes reflect quality education in general; and whether or not the perceptions of this subgroup support or oppose the perceptions outlined in the education reform documents. To solicit additional data for these research objectives, participants were asked question number 8. The responses to this question were organized in terms of the number of negative features each participant elaborated on. Question number 8 read as follows:

Describe some experiences you have had that have left you feeling that Newfoundland's education system is in need of improvement.

Ten respondents listed only one specific area of local education that they believed needed improvement. A more in-depth analysis of the responses to question number 8 will be included later when the strengths and weaknesses of local education are discussed. Subject D was the only participant to list two areas of local education that she believed are in need of improvement. However, it is interesting that earlier in the data analysis she gave the local education system the most positive rating overall.

In discussing negatives of local education, Subject F indicated that, based on their experiences, their family believes that the system is lacking overall. For example, the mother and father claimed that the local curriculum could probably be about 10 percent more academically demanding. However, the children of Subject F are doing well in the local system. The mother gave an explanation as to why their children might be doing

well. Her explanation throws doubt on the couple's earlier conclusion: That their kids' "high performance" in the local system might be due to low overall academic expectations. These are the words articulated by Subject F:

I think more demands have to be made and more in-depth programs (locally). Here it's a piece of cake (for her four children between ages 10-16) However, it is their mother tongue (English) and it has been said that when you move from the French system to the mother tongue it is a piece of cake because you have to work so hard and give so much attention (when learning in French) so it could be a spinoff.

Finally, Subject I, who has local experience with primary, elementary and high school, claimed that she could not think of anything negative about local education:

The system is fine as it is. Except for those cutbacks that may be happening. Other than that, the way it is in place right now I do find it extremely, extremely good.

Participants were generally very specific and only briefly elaborated, when asked to respond to question number 8 above, which was specifically designed to give them a direct outlet to express dissatisfaction with local education. *I believe this indicates that* participants are inadvertently confirming their earlier positive evaluation of their local education experiences.

Responses to question number 7 provided further confirmation of participants' positive feelings about, and experiences with, local schooling as they have experienced it. The responses to this question were organized in terms of the number of positive features

of local education each participant elaborated on. Question number 7 asked the participants to:

Describe experiences you have had in Newfoundland that make you feel there are some positive things about the local education system.

Based on their experiences, nine respondents elaborated on three to five positive features of local education. However, as stated earlier, when asked to describe negative experiences or features ten respondents discussed only one item. This again provides further verification to the emerging theme that parents whose children attended schools nationally and internationally are generally happy with the education system they are experiencing in Newfoundland. The following comments are representative of the responses participants provided when asked to describe some positive experiences with Newfoundland's education system:

Well I say that over at School E, I tend to find everything fairly positive. I find the principal really good. And, the parental involvement over there. They really want you to get involved with what the kids are doing and stuff like that. The math program I really like. Everything has been a very positive thing over there, (Subject H).

From my experience I think the remedial program is good. The music program is good and the phys. ed program. That's important for me because (my son) likes sports. (My son) is getting a well-rounded academic program. There is a lot of emphasis put on, not just on academics, but on the whole development of the child. And I think that is very important and they consider each child as an individual and important So that, to me, is positive, (Subject J).

The local education reform documents have consistently looked at standardized test scores to evaluate this province's academic performance (Arruda, 1997), and few, according to Fowler (1990), would argue that academic achievement is the mainstay of education. Academic achievement is emphasized in both the literature and in the government's education reform documents. Therefore, I believed it was necessary to ask participants whether or not they are satisfied with the academic demands of their child or children's local school, and whether or not these demands are on par with experiences elsewhere. Thus, participants were asked to respond to question number 2 which directly addressed the academic standards and demands of the schools their children have attended both locally and elsewhere. The responses to this question were organized in terms of the following: extremely high, very good, and good. They were also categorized as either above par, on par, or below par when compared to the academic demands of schools outside this province. Question number 2 read as follows:

Tell me how you rate the academic demands of your child's (children) present and previous schools both in terms of school work and homework expectations.

In response to this question, Subject D indicated that she perceives the local academic demands to be extremely high in this province, especially in the area of mathematics. She also stated that overall academic demands are higher at the primary and elementary schools her children have attended in this province, than in the public school her children attended in Scotland. However, the academic standards in the schools her

children have attended locally are on par with the private school her eldest daughter attended in England. She stated that her daughters had not attended junior high schools outside Newfoundland. However, based on her observations, she believes the present academic demands of her oldest daughter's junior high school in Newfoundland are higher than in the Scottish junior high system, but similar to those at the junior high level in the English private school. Subject D's words were as follows:

Academically I think here is more demanding. Math extremely demanding Some of the things they come home with, even I have to look at them and think (before doing) *I think overall the demands here are higher.* When my youngest daughter went to school here they put her in grade one and she was really struggling. She was really finding it hard here. When we look at the older children (*junior high*) here and in the private school in England, I'd say the academic demands are the same. But compared to Scotland there is much more expectations of homework here. In the private school in England there was *no homework*. Here math is major. I've never seen children come home with so much homework I approve of children having homework I prefer to see just a little bit. It's mainly math (in junior high) and in elementary it's math as well. Even speaking to other people who come here (from away), they say the homework here is amazing, and also from some Canadian people.

Four participants believe that the academic demands are very good in the local schools their children have attended. They also expressed their satisfaction with these academic demands. Two of these four participants believe their local experiences are above par when compared to the academic demands of schools their children attended elsewhere. The other two participants claimed that their local experiences in this domain are on par with experiences outside Newfoundland. Subject I's response is typical of the

four participants who, based on their family's experiences, believe that the academic demands of local education are very good:

I find the basics are much more paid attention to here in Newfoundland I find they need the fundamentals. They meet them here in Newfoundland more than they do in Nova Scotia They wouldn't put them forward to junior high here (at School I), until they were ready for it, which is just excellent, excellent . . . I find the demands on the level that they are (here) quite good . . . I think any more would be too much . . . *(It's) about the same (as Nova Scotia) But you are putting much more into the basics, which is good. (My daughter) usually spends an hour and a half (here) and that is good. That is reasonable.*

Six out of the twelve participants are pleased with the academic demands in the local schools they have encountered, and they stated that their level of satisfaction is good overall. The majority of these six participants claimed that local academic demands are on par with elsewhere. One participant claimed that academic demands in local schools are above par when compared with academic demands elsewhere. One of the six participants who claimed academic expectations are good locally had one earlier experience outside the province that was comparable to the local situation. She had also experienced one system outside Newfoundland that was below local standards in terms of academics. Subject H's response is typical of the six who claimed that local academic standards are good overall:

Now over at School V, I would say they are pretty demanding. They want the kids, and I think a lot has to do with (principal) to do well particularly if they see

kids who can do well. They really encourage it Over there I don't have a problem. I really didn't like the school in Ontario very much honestly . . . I found the school in Nova Scotia was a really good school. I actually find School V (here) and the one in Nova Scotia similar in what they wanted from the kids.

The majority of the research participants stated that academic demands in the local schools their children have attended are on par with their national and international experiences. However, some of the participants claimed that at least one curriculum area needs to improve in terms of academic demands. This will be further discussed in the section on strengths and weaknesses of the provincial education system. Subject B's words illustrate the voice of participants expressing concerns over a curriculum area in need of improvement:

The Moroccan schools also have a very high demand. Both the Arabic and French schools had very high academic demands. There was no extra activities. You were just there to do your academics and that was it Most schools I have been at in Montreal (both as a teacher and as a parent) were comparable to ours. The same academic levels We use some of the similar text that they used in the private school (private American school in Morocco). But I found there they were much more accommodating for using accelerated programs . . . but (teacher) may have only had 18 students in his class, half the size of our classrooms, and you had a teaching aid, half time or full time, it all depended . . . I'm sure that we'd be splitting our curriculum to accommodate those who needed to make accelerated progress and making up for those who can't manage . . . if we only had 18 kids and teaching aids.

Only Subject F consistently judged provincial academic demands below par. These are his words:

Six here, ten there (French semi-private school in Montreal) Here it is as if what is getting covered is broader (in terms of the number of curriculum areas and topic per course per term) but how to get it all done is not laid down as well. Whereas in the French, French system, the semi-private school, they weren't trying to accomplish as much. But you accomplished what you were going to accomplish. When you were finished accomplishing it, you knew it I think more demands have to be made on the kids and more in-depth programs (are needed here).

However, Subject F pointed out that it is unfair to compare their local experiences with their experiences in Quebec. First, their children had attended a Semi-Private French school and the French educational system generally stresses excellence in the basics of reading, writing and math, and puts very little emphasis on the arts and humanities. This was confirmed by Subject B above, when describing her experiences with a French education system in Morocco. These are Subject F's words:

I find it difficult (to compare to our system here) because the French programs are just more demanding from grade one on. Also, one of them was in a public French school that was more demanding than the English. The (French) immersion was less demanding than both the French private and public schools (in Montreal).

As was made evident earlier, Subject F also stated that their children are probably doing well in local schools because their family's mother tongue is English, and for the first time they are being educated in their mother tongue. They claimed that this, rather than low academic demands, could explain why their children appear to be doing better academically in this province. Subject F explains:

... it is their mother tongue (English) and it has been said that when you move from the French system to the mother tongue it is a piece of cake because you have to work so hard and give so much attention (when learning in French). So it could be a spinoff.

The French school Subject F's children attended in Quebec was also semi-private. To recap, semi-private means that one has to pay full tuition to attend, but the school has to teach the provincially prescribed curriculum. Subject F did acknowledge that comparing Newfoundland's education system to a private or semi-private system is a bit unfair as the standards and expectations differ substantially between the two systems. These are the words of Subject F:

Definitely the private schools are more demanding and they get the results. Those kids are getting what they pay for.

Question number 2 asked participants to judge the academic demands of the local schools they have experienced. While the responses to question number 2 were not as positive as the responses to questions 7, 8, 11 and 12, they were nonetheless encouraging. Thus, if one takes what the research participants are saying in its totality, this parental subgroup, based on lived experiences, judges Newfoundland's education system positively overall.

The Second Primary Theme: Parental Perceptions of Quality Schooling

Introduction

This section of Chapter IV focuses on the parental subgroup's perceptions of the components of quality education. The topics to be presented under this theme are as follows: a broad and well-rounded curriculum, parental involvement, home and school communications, teachers, school administrators, and school atmosphere. To obtain data on these attributes of education, the responses to questions number 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 11 were closely analysed. The terms I used to categorize the responses varied depending on the nature of the question. Thus, the categorization of participants' responses will be addressed as the need arises. The questions were expressed as follows:

Question Number 1:

Compare for me the school your child (children) now attends with the school (schools) previously attended by talking about some of the following: discipline, home-school communications, attitudes of children toward one another, extra curricular programs and activities, interest level and involvement on the part of administrators, personality and communication style of teachers, parental involvement and so forth.

Question Number 3:

Tell me about the programs that go beyond the basics of reading, writing and math (ie. music, fine arts, religion, physical education, science, social studies etc.) that your child (children) participates in locally and has participated in elsewhere. How do you feel about schools offering such programs, and how do you rate these programs overall, if you feel these programs should be offered.

Question Number 4:

Describe the atmosphere of the school (schools) your child (children) attends

locally and then describe the atmosphere of the school (schools) your child (children) has previously attended. (In other words, how do you feel, and how do you think your child feels, or felt, upon going into this school.)

Question Number 6:

Tell me about some of the experiences (both positive and negative) you have had with teachers both locally and elsewhere.

Question Number 7:

Describe experiences you have had in Newfoundland that makes you feel there are some positive things about the local education system.

Question Number 8:

Describe some experiences you have had that have left you feeling that Newfoundland's education system is in need of improvement.

Question Number 9:

Tell me what you feel are some of the most important things an education system or school can offer a child to help him/her fit into society now, and later as a successful adult.

Question Number 11:

As a result of your experiences with education, schools and teachers, how do you feel Newfoundland's system rates when compared to your experiences elsewhere? Is it better, worse or the same overall?

To reiterate, this research indicates that the parents of children who have attended schools nationally and internationally as well as locally, based on their experiences, judge the quality of the local education system positively. I also set out to discover and describe the attributes of education and schooling that this parental subgroup believes reflect quality education. To elicit this information I posed question number 9. The responses to question number 9 were analysed to see if one or several themes emerged. Question 9 was presented as follows:

Tell me what you feel are some of the important things an education system or school can offer a child to help him or her fit into society, now, and later as a successful adult.

Broad and Well-Rounded Curriculum

The words of Subject G below reflect the main theme in the responses to question number 9:

I guess to prepare him for life after school, some kind of post secondary education. Preparing them to cope with whatever challenges those things bring. I think school has an academic function. There are all sorts of different components. I guess we want kids to come out of school being well adjusted, being able to deal with people, and hopefully to have a good work ethic. It's not just academic. That is important. It's social, your self-esteem. Hopefully you'll nourish that along the way. So school is again multifaceted. Again, the holistic thing, (Subject G).

The goals of education Subject G outlined above reflect the thinking typical of the majority of research participants. These goals are similar to some of the main goals of education outlined in the literature. For example, Ryan and Cooper (1995) stated that recently an educator captured the views of many when he wrote that a good curriculum respects and keeps in balance the need to "educate the three people" in each individual: the citizen, the worker, and the private person. Almost identical views are voiced by Walker and Soltis (1986) when they stated that the three aims of education are to cultivate knowledge, to sustain and improve society, and to foster the well-being of individuals.

Despite the fact that the majority of research participants want their children to have a well-rounded educational experience, most also stress that excellence in the basics and academics should still be a priority of schooling. The following words are representative of this concern:

I would like my children to be well-rounded first and foremost. But because the world deems that a person needs so many pieces of paper to survive, at a level which is livable, you must focus on the academic. They can also work to be well-rounded in sports, and the arts. But the academics would be most important because of the way the world is. They will not be accepted anywhere in this world unless they are educated. But I also think as well as the academics, there is *phys. ed, social life, and cultural events that people (need to) be exposed to*, (Subject K).

The views of Subjects G and K are in line with literature and the results of Gallup Polls on parental attitudes which illustrate that parents expect schools to teach the basics, but more than the basics (Ballantine, 1997; Evans & Weible, 1982). Like parents generally, this parental subgroup places importance on academics. But they also value an education system that develops a well-rounded child.

To gain insight into the curriculum areas this parental subgroup values in a quality education I asked question number 3. The responses varied enormously depending on the curriculum area being addressed. But generally I categorized the parents' attitudes toward, and judgements of, each curriculum area in terms of the following: high approval rating; approval rating; or objects to this particular curriculum area being included in a school's curriculum. Question number 3 is as follows:

Tell me about the programs that go beyond the basics of reading, writing and math (ie. music, fine arts, religion, physical education, science, social studies etc.) that your child (children) participates in locally and has participated in elsewhere. How do you feel about schools offering such programs, and how do you rate these programs overall, if you feel they should be offered.

The following responses are representative of those provided by all twelve research participants:

I think it's wonderful to offer these extra programs (referring to music, physical education, art and so forth). I think it's good, very good, as people have to be well-rounded. I think it is important for the children who aren't good at other things. Everyone has to excel at something. I think if their self esteem is low they aren't gonna do well in anything. Children can't be good at everything. You may take away the one subject that may build that child's self-esteem and then do better in other subjects. I think if you take away the arts you are cutting out a whole group of children, (Subject A).

I think school is a combination of different things and I feel all these things are important (music, art, religion, French, physical education etc.). It bothers me that some of these things are being cut from the curriculum. These things are extremely important, i.e., band and art Some kids who may have trouble coping with the rigors of academia, may excel at some of these other programs. To me that is important. Schools, . . . got to take a holistic approach. These things are important. It bothers me when we get into cutbacks and we lose so many of these frills but I don't think they are frills. To me they are very important, (Subject G).

These responses again illustrate that the research participants want their children exposed to a well-rounded education and a broad curriculum. Furthermore, all participants are happy with the broad curriculum presently offered in this province. They consider this a positive aspect of the provincial education system and a necessary component of quality

education. This premise finds support in literature by Eisner (1994), Fowler (1990), Schlechty (1997), and Willie (1987) which claims that a primary characteristic of a good education is diversity in the learning environment.

There were many discussions on the quality of local education. During these discussions it became apparent that there are a couple of specific local curriculum areas, beyond academics, that are judged highly by this parental subgroup. Furthermore, the research participants indicate that they believe these curriculum areas should be included in any first rate education system. These curriculum areas are: music and physical education.

Music

After analysing and re-analysing the participants' words it is obvious that this parental subgroup has very high praise for the music programs offered in the local schools their children have attended. Furthermore, this parental subgroup believes a good music program is an important attribute of quality education. The positive comments regarding the provincial music program were echoed again and again throughout the interviews. They were especially frequent when participants were asked questions number 3, 7 and 11. Any commentaries pertaining to the local music programs were categorized as follows: excellent, very good, or good. Furthermore, the responses were also categorized in terms of whether the parents judged local music programs as above par or on par with music programs outside this province.

Question Number 3:

Tell me about the programs that go beyond the basics of reading, writing and math (ie. music, fine arts, religion, physical education, science, social studies etc.) that your child (children) participates in locally and has participated in elsewhere. How do you feel about schools offering such programs, and how do you rate these programs overall, if you feel they should be offered?

Question Number 7:

Describe experiences you have had in Newfoundland that make you feel there are some positive things about the local education system.

Question Number 11:

As a result of your experiences with education, schools and teachers, how do you feel Newfoundland's system rates when compared to your experiences elsewhere? Is it better, worse or the same overall?

The responses to the above questions revealed that the research participants believe the music programs are the most outstanding feature of the local school curriculum. Ten participants stated that the music programs are excellent. For example, in the words of Subject B:

The music program here is excellent. At School II there is nothing that can compare with it . . . Ours is good here and I also believe that the band program is a wonderful academic. I don't consider it a frill . . . The music program adds a tightness to a school program because you get school bands which is another school team as such. In the junior high program we had in Montreal there was no music program . . . There weren't any music programs in any of the schools I was in, in Montreal. There was none. Occasionally you did sing but that was because you had a play to put on or something like that . . . So we are very fortunate here. In Morocco, at the American school, it was very good. We put off musicals and all sorts of plays . . . The French schools in Morocco and the Moroccan schools did not have music programs.

To recap, ten participants stated that the local music programs are excellent. Nine

of these ten participants also stated that local programs are above par when compared with all music programs they experienced nationally and internationally. Only one of the ten participants who stated that the local programs are excellent claimed that she had encountered a music program outside Newfoundland that was of equal quality when compared to the local programs she has experienced. Subject A is representative of the parents who judged the provincial music programs as not only excellent, but better than music programs they experienced elsewhere:

Music, excellent. The music program here is unbelievable . . . Even my son in grade two is playing the violin and loves it. It was available in Nova Scotia but not in the school. He had to go somewhere to take it. You had to go to the teacher's center so it wasn't so easy. I just find it's in the school here, and in Nova Scotia they had to go out. In Nova Scotia you had to have car, resources, time, lack stress level, etc. but here it's just so easy. The music is exceptional, (Subject A).

Two participants judged the local music programs as very good. One of these two parents claimed that the local programs they have encountered are on par with music programs nationally and internationally. The other parent stated that the provincial programs she has experienced are above par when compared with earlier experiences. Here are the words of Subjects H and K:

I find it very good . . . The teacher over there is wonderful. The kids love her and they have music about three days out of six . . . They have band for (her daughter's) age (10) and older. They have recorder in their music . . . The music program itself I find very good. They get tested, they learn dictation, and they learn recorder, and they sing. There was no real music class in Ontario at least for that age (Primary). They would have a little time during the day where they'd sing

together and they'd take out the tambourines or whatever. But they didn't have an actual "go to music" class. They have it over there. Even the kindergartens go out all the time, (Subject H).

Excellent. The teacher . . . gives it 100 and 50% of her time and the kids loved her . . . I personally found the music program really good in Edmonton too . . . Both programs (in Newfoundland and Edmonton) are really good, (Subject K).

This parental subgroup judged the music programs in their children's local schools very highly because they believe their overall quality is enhanced by the existence of music specialists in the schools. I was surprised to learn that music teachers are not part of a school's full-time teaching staff in some Canadian provinces. Subject L explained it this way:

In the elementary schools (here) they have the full music teacher. There were no full time music teachers (in New Brunswick) that I recall. In the last few years it was the same kind of thing as gym. They didn't have full time teachers, whereas here they do. (That is, the classroom teacher did a program with the kids two or three times per cycle and a district specialist would visit and hold a class once every couple of weeks. (For further details, see Subject L's later comments on physical education, on pp. 99-100).

Finally, other than a comment by Subject K, which implied that she would like to see the school concerts involve the whole student body rather than just the choirs and bands, not one negative comment was expressed regarding the music programs this subgroup has encountered in local schools.

The fact that parents of children who have attended schools nationally and internationally as well as in this province judge the local music programs highly is very

encouraging in light of research showing a relationship between exposure to music and achievement in other curriculum areas. Numerous studies indicate that arts education (which includes music) should be considered the fourth “R” in the curriculum. A study at the University of California found that preschoolers who received daily music lessons for eight months scored 80 percent higher in spatial intelligence than children who did not receive the lessons. According to researchers, strong spatial intelligence allows one to easily develop complex math and engineering skills (Allen, 1992). Also, in 1995, the U. S. College Entrance Examination Board found that the student scores for those who studied the arts for more than four years were 59 points higher on the math section than the students who had no experience in the arts. An interesting study involving seventy classes of students, aged seven to fifteen years, took place in Switzerland and Austria. In this study the students who had the number of music classes per week increased while their language and math classes decreased were better at the end of the study in language and math than the control group whose number of music lessons per week remained consistent while their the number of language and math classes they received increased (Pitkeathly, 1997).

Based on their experiences in six local schools, parents whose children previously attended schools nationally and internationally judge the local education system positively. One reason they see this province's education system in a positive light is that it has excellent music programs. Furthermore, they imply that music and the arts are vital components of any quality education system.

Physical Education

Another curriculum area that this parental subgroup believes should be offered in an effective education system is physical education. Again the data regarding the local physical education programs came from analysing the responses to questions number 3, 7 and 11 outlined above. Data concerning the local physical education programs was organized as follows: excellent, very good, good, and poor. In addition, the responses regarding local physical education programs were also categorized as either above par, on par or below par when compared to other physical education programs the research participants encountered outside Newfoundland.

When comparing their local experiences with their national and international experiences, two parents judged the provincial physical education programs as excellent.

In Subject H's voice:

Physical education. Over at (School V) great! They get it three times a cycle. And the teacher over there is great. The kids love it. They love her. She is great with the kids. . . . They do a lot of stuff with music. They'll go in and learn how to do jigs and things. They are into gymnastics now, so (teacher) always has the tape recorder going while they are doing that. They don't always have to necessarily do set things. Once she teaches them set things . . . they are allowed to do their own routine and things like that. So they have a very good balance . . . but still they have a great phys. ed program. I'm pretty pleased with the program.

Five participants judged the local physical education programs as very good. In the words of Subject J:

Very good because he has gym class twice a week. And they have the intramurals and the skating. He's learned to skate . . . (School III) is great because they have that field and then in the good weather and in the Spring and the summer, they have a lot of their phys. ed outside on the soccer field.

Four participants believe the local physical education programs they have experienced are good overall. However, all four of these research participants elaborated on one negative feature of the physical education programs in their children's local schools. For example, Subject K stated that the quality of the local physical education programs she has encountered is good, but that the quantity and overall emphasis in the upper grades needs to be given higher priority. This is what Subject K had to say:

Phys. ed program is fine. Unfortunately it is only half time (the position). That goes with cut backs. The program itself is well-rounded from kindergarten and it becomes more and more advanced right up to the grade six level. The kids enjoy it The problem is you can't have gym every day and by the time the kids get into junior high school and high school, gym is not part of the curriculum which is really, really wrong. Physical activity should be a requirement. It should not be neglected. It should be a prerequisite for getting into university.

Only one parent was dissatisfied with the physical education programs she has experienced locally. Her main contention is that the local physical education programs are not well-rounded. In Subject D's own words:

Awful! I am speaking as someone having gone through school and truly enjoyed sports. I think there should be more emphasis (here). I've not seen any evidence of field and track here. It's more volleyball, basketball, hockey. There are other

sports you can play. At home they do field hockey, soccer, rugby, occasionally cricket in some schools and there is the field and track, and swimming. There is no swimming at (Schools I and II) at all. I'd like to see more sports to get a well-balanced child . . . there is just no gymnastics at all here in the school. Back home they all do gymnastics . . . (It) is a shame because kids are suffering.

Overall, when asked whether the local physical education programs are above par, on par, or below par when compared with experiences elsewhere, the parents once again confirmed that overall the local physical education programs they have experienced are very good. For example, five participants stated that the local programs they have encountered are better than the physical education programs they experienced in schools nationally and internationally. This is exemplified in Subject C's voice:

Phys. ed is very good here . . . It was fairly good there (Texas) but I find it a lot stronger here. He does a lot more with them, games and really gives them a good workout. I really like that.

Five subjects stated that, based on their experiences, the local programs are on par with the physical education programs they experienced outside this province. Subject I's response is typical in this regard:

(Daughter) is the only one taking phys. ed. Extremely good. It is basically on par with Nova Scotia.

Subject D stated that her experiences with the physical education programs in local schools are below par when compared with experiences elsewhere. Subject B, had one

public school experience in Montreal that was comparable to her local experiences. She also related one experience with a physical education program that was better than programs offered locally. This positive experience was at a private American school in Morocco. She used the following words to explain her understanding as to why some curriculum offered elsewhere, such as physical education programs, are better than the programs she has encountered locally:

I have had them elsewhere and the only school with higher academic level was actually the private school (Private American school in Morocco) that they went to and that was because the demands of the parents were met out of their pockets. If they (local schools) had the money, we could do every bit as good as they were doing out in that private school.

Reviewing the participants' words, I was again surprised to discover that recently arrived parents judged the local physical education programs they have encountered highly because, unlike many other provinces, there are still specialist teachers teaching the programs. This was expressed by the participants whose previous experiences were in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Ontario. The voice of Subject L below illustrates what all three of these participants had to say regarding this issue:

Phys. ed here is . . . excellent because . . . they (New Brunswick) didn't have a full time phys. ed teacher, whereas here they do. They (the home room teacher) would do what they could do with the children. They weren't necessarily learning basketball or gymnastics or whatever on an outgoing basis . . . They might have two or three phys. ed classes per week, taught by the home room teacher, and the second week they might have one taught by the gym teacher and so on. The phys.

ed teachers were just basically hired by the district and then would rotate around to different schools.

Based on their experiences in six local schools, parents whose children previously attended schools nationally and internationally judge the local education system positively. One reason they see this province's education system in a positive light is because there are good physical education programs. Furthermore, they imply that good physical education programs are a vital components of any quality education system.

Social and Cultural Attributes of Quality Education

Introduction

I also intended to discover if there are attributes of education and schooling, besides academics and curriculum content, that this parental subgroup recognizes as necessary components of quality education. Furthermore, I hoped to discover whether or not any of these additional attributes of quality education are evident in the local schools the research participants are experiencing. Consequently, the following open-ended questions were included to help guide the informal interviews and elicit data on the more intangible components of education. Again, how the responses were categorized depended on the question to which the research participants were responding. The specifics will be elaborated on as the responses to each individual question are examined. The questions

read as follows:

Question Number 1:

Compare for me the school (schools) your child (children) now attends with the school (schools) previously attended by talking about some of the following: discipline, home-school communications, attitudes of children towards one another, extra curricular programs and activities, interest level and involvement on the part of administrators, personality and communication style of teachers, parental involvement and so forth.

Question Number 4:

Describe the atmosphere of the school (schools) your child (children) attends locally and then describe the atmosphere of the school (schools) your child (children) has previously attended. (In other words, how did you feel, and how do you think your child feels or felt upon going into this school.)

Question Number 7:

Describe experiences you have had in Newfoundland that make you feel there are some positive things about the local education system.

Question Number 8:

Describe some experiences you have had that have left you feeling that Newfoundland's education system is in need of improvement.

Parental Involvement

Literature states that effective schools and education systems reach out and draw in parents instead of ignoring them (Ryan & Cooper, 1995). As outlined in the literature review in Chapter Two, research has also found that parental involvement is one of the best ways to aid academic excellence in schools (Dye, 1992; Epstein, 1985; Epstein & Connors, 1992; Reynolds, 1993; Ross, 1994). According to Henderson (1981), research on parental involvement over the past thirty years indicates that:

When parents show a strong interest in their children's schooling, they promote the development of attitudes that are key to achievement, attitudes that are more a product of how the family interacts, than of its social class, or income. If schools treat parents as powerless or unimportant, or if they discourage parents from taking an interest, they promote the development of attitudes in parents, and consequently their children, that inhibit achievement (p.3).

Because of the amount of literature on the importance of parental involvement I believed it was crucial to obtain the participants' perspectives on this topic. When analysing the data addressing parental involvement in local schools, I focused on the following: the quantity of opportunities for involvement; the quality of involvement for the parent; and whether or not the parents felt truly comfortable and welcome when volunteering at their children's school. Again the responses regarding parental involvement were categorized in the following manner: excellent, very good, and good. Then the responses regarding parental involvement were analysed to see if they indicated whether local experiences were above par, on par, or below par when compared with experiences outside Newfoundland. The main question addressing parental involvement was framed as follows:

Question Number 1:

Compare for me the school (schools) your child (children) now attends with the school (schools) previously attended by talking about some of the following: discipline, home-school communications, attitudes of children toward one another, extra curricular programs and activities, interest level and involvement on the part of administrators, personality and communication style of teachers, parental involvement and so forth.

When asked to compare the schools their child or children have attended locally, with schools previously attended nationally or internationally in terms of parental involvement, all local primary and elementary school experiences are judged as excellent by three participants and as very good by nine participants. Subject B's response is typical in this area:

Parents are more involved in our schools here than they are elsewhere in North America. I am saying this from my Montreal experience because our parents go in and volunteer in the libraries, in the classrooms, they run our sports programs for us . . . They are involved because they want their children to have the best and they know the money is not there, so they got to get in there and do it for their children. When I was in Montreal, I had one parent volunteer in my library and she was a foreigner. I find it really important. If I show up and spend a lot of time at the school my kids attitude towards school improves. Here in Newfoundland we are really very involved in our schools. School IV, School III, School I, and School II have a heavy parental involvement. Volunteering is an easy thing to do in that school (School II, which her child attends). The schools in Morocco, you weren't welcome. You were asked not to come into the school but to wait outside the yard to pick up your child. The Private American English school in Morocco had exceptional parent involvement. The parents ran the school so it was different in that way and hard to compare to our school in this area (because) private schools are a different thing . . . of course you are welcome, you are paying big bucks.

The research participants' local experiences regarding all aspects of parental involvement in the primary and elementary grades were positive. However, some parents believe there is a difference in the quality and quantity of opportunities for parental involvement between the primary and elementary schools on one hand, and the junior high schools on the other. Subjects A and D, who describe their experiences with two separate

local primary schools (Schools I and IV) as excellent, do not believe they can get involved in their children's local junior high school (School II). Subject A, however, contributes this to an "age" factor and the fact that teenagers don't want parents around their school. Subject L also claimed that her daughter in junior high (School VI) discourages her involvement in school activities even though she personally believes School VI welcomes her involvement. This claim finds support in the literature on parental involvement in education. Research has found that the degree of parental involvement and level of satisfaction with schools lessen as children advance through the grades (Baenen, 1995; Isenberg, 1992; Warren & Lagomarcino, 1981). Subject L's words are also representative of the beliefs of Subjects A and D:

In reference to Junior High, they are looking for volunteers to go to St. Pierre and, no, (daughter) didn't want me to go. Absolutely didn't want me to go. It's them (referring to the age group), (Subject L).

Subject D, also expressed similar sentiments. However, she also claimed that for some reason she just doesn't feel welcome in her child's local junior high school. These are her words:

In the elementary (kindergarten to grade four) I find it excellent, above excellent. They really want the parents involved. Junior high is not very good for two reasons. One, the kids really don't want you in there. The other thing is that I don't think the teachers want you in there.

When comparing the degree of parental involvement locally with situations elsewhere, five of the participants claimed that, based on their experiences, the level of involvement locally is greater than in all previous schools their children attended nationally and internationally. Subject F's words are representative of those parents who believe that the degree of parental involvement is greater in Newfoundland than in some other provinces and countries:

At (School II here) there is more than ample opportunity (for parental involvement). No, there was no parental involvement allowed whatsoever (in Montreal). There is no input from parents whatsoever. It was the philosophy of the school. I think that both (parental involvement policies) have a place. I am happy with both systems. Non-teaching, support staff is really important. I think that parental involvement maybe replaces that (here) but not in as formal a way. So if you don't have that support (non-teaching staff) then I think parental involvement is real positive I think parents here want to be in the system to make sure that they (children) are getting what they (parents) feel is necessary.

Five research participants stated that their local experiences with parental involvement are comparable to the experiences they previously had outside Newfoundland. A typical response in this area is that of Subject C:

I find it pretty good. There are lots of opportunities to give input into the school and to volunteer. . . . A lot of parental involvement (in Texas) too.

Two participants had two experiences each with separate education systems

outside Newfoundland. For both participants, one of these experiences with parental involvement was judged below their experiences in Newfoundland. In addition, both parents explained that their other experiences outside the province were on par when compared with opportunities for parental involvement in their children's local schools.

Based on their experiences, two parents stated that local schools tend to have a higher quality of parental involvement, and that everyone, rather than a select few, is encouraged to become involved. According to research, parents want to be involved in more meaningful ways than is traditional (for example, attending concerts and having bake sales) (Collins, 1995; Lane, 1980; May, 1980; Williams & Chavkin, 1989). This is clearly illustrated in Subject L's words:

There are a lot more parents volunteering in the school here. Parents go in to do photo copying and you cut out and you help the teachers get their lessons ready, which was something that wasn't done in the other school. There were volunteers in the other school that helped with hot lunches, helped to supervise at lunch and recess time. But they were external to the classroom. Their jobs were a little bit different. A lot of the volunteers who did things through the school for the spring fair but it was always the same group and it was very difficult to be accepted in that group. It was very cliquey that way.

Subjects B, K, F and E also indicated that volunteers may be prominent in this province because of funding cutbacks and the lack of resources in the schools necessitate it. Subject E believes that in light of recent financial cuts to education there is an increased need for parental involvement in this province. However, she appears to

question the practice of having parental volunteers substitute for personnel and resources (i.e. librarians). Here are her concerns regarding this issue:

There is a lot of opportunity for the parents here. It is actually more important to get parents into the school than it was years ago. So I think that is probably an area they can improve. Getting more parents down at the school kinda fills the gaps where they have cut backs (referring to staffing positions). I hate to say that. I'd rather see them hire the teachers, (Subject E).

The research participants indicated that there is a high level of parental involvement in the local schools they have experienced. Overall, parents seem to value the opportunities that exist in the schools they are involved in locally, and they also believe that parental involvement is an important feature of quality education generally. Thus, another reason this parental subgroup judges their local educational experiences favourably is that there is a high degree of parental involvement.

Home and School Communications

Literature states that good home and school communication is a hallmark of quality schools (Ryan & Cooper, 1995). Therefore, I believe it was vital to gauge the research participants views regarding home and school communications in the schools they have encountered in this province. When attempting to elicit data on the quality and quantity of home and school communications, I focused on whether or not the research

participants were content with the following: the degree of opportunity that exists for parents to communicate their concerns to the school community; the amount of information forthcoming regarding events and happenings in, or concerning, their children's schools; the amount of information forthcoming regarding their child's overall development and progress in school; and the degree of honesty and promptness of teachers and school personnel when communicating with parents. The data on home and school communications were organized as follows: excellent, very good, good, and poor. The data were also categorized in terms of above par, on par, or below par when compared with experiences regarding home and school communications outside this province.

In an attempt to solicit data on the social and cultural attributes of local schools, participants were asked question number 1:

Compare for me the school (schools) your child (children) now attends with the school (schools) previously attended by talking about some of the following: discipline, home-school communications, attitudes of children towards one another, extra curricular programs and activities, interest level and involvement on the part of administrators, personality and communication style of teachers, parental involvement and so forth.

One research participant believes the quality and quantity of home and school communications in the two schools her children have attended locally are excellent. In Subject A's words:

Communication in both locations (Here and Nova Scotia) - excellent. Proactive notes coming home from the home and school association, and from the teacher.

Seven participants judge the quality and quantity of home and school communications in the local schools their children have attended as very good. Subject L's response is representative in this area:

As for information I find that this school is very good at getting out information. At the beginning of the year you get a run down of your child's curriculum for the year. You get memos on an ongoing basis, sometimes two and three a month, as to what is happening, special events. The older grade (School VI, a junior high) I get memos once a month which is good because it keeps me on top of my daughter's activities. Now for communication in the other school (in New Brunswick), you got your memos and things like that but I find that I am more informed here. . . . There are always memos coming home. The home and school association sends home memos and you know which one is coming from the school and which one is from them because they have different colours.

Three participants believe the quality and quantity of local home and school communications in their children's schools are good overall. Subject B's response is typical:

I believe I'm kept informed of what's happening in school by getting this newsletter that comes out once a month and the brown envelope. I like that idea. I like having my children's tests all together and the teacher telling me these ones will be in the envelope. This method was never used in the French schools (in Quebec). The French schools had absolutely no communication with you whatsoever. Teacher went in there to teach and that was it. The French school in Morocco didn't keep us informed and the Moroccan schools certainly didn't. The (private) American school did. The parents ran the school, they were the trustees, they ran the school board. I think it's even better here than what I remember from

Montreal too.

Finally, Subject D stated that her experiences with home and school communications in Newfoundland have been poor. However, her analysis of her experiences regarding home and school communications in Scotland and England were also negative. She claimed that her negative experiences with communications in England, Scotland, and Newfoundland were the result of children forgetting newsletters in school and generally misplacing items, rather than neglect on the part of the schools. This is Subject D's voice regarding this issue:

Communications I'd say are awful here. I think they were at home too because the kids never bring information home. I mean you do eventually get it whether it's late or not. . . . It depends on the child, not the system.

When asked to compare the quality and quantity of home and school communications locally with experiences in this domain elsewhere, the local situation again looks good in the schools the research participants' children have attended. Three research participants judged local experiences as above par when compared to previous experiences outside Newfoundland. Subject K's voice is clear in this regard:

The information is better provided at the current school (St. John's) my children are going to than the one in Edmonton. Information comes out on a calendar provided each month and on the calendar there is specific special occasions, birthdays whatever. As well as if there are any notations on the reverse side or

additional documentations attached. . . . But the bottom line is this school (here) provides more information.

Based on their experiences, seven participants believe that overall the quality and quantity of home and school communications in the schools their children have attended in this province are on par when compared with most schools their children previously attended. In Subject I's words:

Very good. Very well. It's extremely good. With all the notices that are sent home, constantly and on a consistent basis . . . and I always receive them. At the schools in Nova Scotia it was the same thing. I did get everything and on a regular basis. It was good. Between the two places (Nova Scotia and Newfoundland) there was an even balance (in quality and quantity of communications).

Two participants each had two educational experiences outside Newfoundland. Both of these parents had one experience elsewhere that was on par with the local schools they encountered regarding home and school communications. Both parents also had one experience elsewhere that was below par when compared to their local experiences regarding home and school communications.

Based on experiences in this province, parents of children who attended schools nationally and internationally believe local home and school communications are very good generally, and on or above par when compared with experiences in this regard elsewhere. Not one research participant claimed that their local experiences with home and

school communications were below their experiences elsewhere. This is important as effective schools literature maintains that coherence, meaning that the positive elements of the school are pervasive, is maintained in quality schools. But coherence cannot be maintained unless all members of the school community are kept informed. Therefore, another hallmark of effective schools is good communications in terms of report cards, and notification of quiz and examination results, periodic newsletters to parents, and regular parent-teacher meetings and activities to encourage parents to visit the schools (Ryan & Cooper, 1995). If the data and the literature are valid, then this parental subgroup's positive views regarding home and school communications in the local schools their children have attended, provide another indicator that education in this province may have some positive components.

Teachers

Literature suggests that the most crucial characteristic of a school is the attitudes and behaviours of teachers and other staff, not material things such as the size of its library or the age of the physical plant (Purkey & Smith, 1985). Therefore, I believe that it is important to solicit parental input on the quality of the local teaching staff they have experienced when attempting to gauge the parents' overall perceptions of their local educational experiences and the components of education they personally view as reflective of quality schooling. To obtain data on the quality of the teaching staff in the local schools the research participants' children have attended I asked the research

participants to discuss the following: the availability of teachers when parents or children have concerns needing to be addressed; how well teachers keep parents informed on issues relating to their child; the communication style of the teacher; how friendly and approachable local teachers are perceived to be; teacher/pupil relationships; and teaching methodologies and styles.

To obtain data regarding this parental subgroup's perceptions of the quality of the teaching staff in the specific schools they have dealt with I included a section in question number 1 and question number 6. The data referring to teachers was organized in terms of the following: excellent, very good, good, and poor. Then the data was analysed to see if this parental subgroup's experiences with local teachers were above par, on par and below par when compared with experiences elsewhere. Questions number 1 and 6 were framed as follows:

Question Number 1:

Compare for me the school (schools) your child (children) now attends with the school (schools) previously attended by talking about some of the following: discipline, home-school communications, attitudes of children towards one another, extra curricular programs and activities, interest level and involvement on the part of administrators, personality and communication style of teachers, parental involvement and so forth.

Question Number 6:

Tell me about some of the experiences (both positive and negative) you have had with teachers both here and elsewhere.

The responses to these questions indicate that one participant believes that the

local teachers she has dealt with in primary, elementary and junior high schools are excellent yet similar to the teachers she encountered elsewhere. Here are Subject I's words:

I find in the elementary (Kindergarten to grade four) and junior high (five to grade eight) here, excellent. The teachers are excellent at advice, excellent communicators that call you if there are any problems and they do it right away. Everything has been just positive I am just thrilled! It was also excellent in Halifax.

Ten participants gave the local teachers they have dealt with a very good evaluation overall. Out of the ten parents who judged local teachers in their children's schools as very good, two believe that they are above par, and five participants state that they are on par with teachers encountered elsewhere. Three of these ten parents had several experiences with teachers in different provinces or countries. Each of these three participants had one experience outside Newfoundland that was below par and one experience that was on par when compared to their local experiences with teachers. Subject C's words are typical of the voice of participants who claim that the quality of the local teaching profession in their children's schools is very good:

Very good. They are straight forward. Very enthusiastic. I found that in both places . . . I haven't had negative experiences here. It's all been positive. I find the teachers just come and talk to you. The teachers are exceptional here. The teachers seemed really friendly (on her first visit). Anywhere I went, they'd say "hello." I was impressed. . . . A lot of these teachers (here) have been around for I don't know how many years, almost 30 years. I cannot believe they are still as good as they are because a lot of times people lose interest when they are around for so

long. I find almost all of them very enthusiastic and they know how to run a classroom and still have . . . the energy to teach Nobody was around for thirty years (in Texas).

One participant graded the local teachers she has encountered as good overall and on par with teachers encountered elsewhere. In Subject K's words:

Both schools, the one in Edmonton and the one here, are both receptive. They are open to comment whether it be good, bad or indifferent. If there is a problem (here), especially with the Kindergarten, she likes to nip it in the bud. The same thing in Edmonton. Generally, both here and in Edmonton, it is pretty standard.

As noted earlier, the perceptions of several participants regarding some aspects of local education are different when the focus shifts from the primary and elementary schools to the junior high schools. This phenomenon was also evident when evaluating the overall quality of the local teaching profession this parental subgroup has dealt with. For example, Subjects A and D judged local primary and elementary teachers highly but stated that their experiences with local junior high teachers have not always been overly positive. Again, support of these parental perceptions can be found in the literature as some studies have found that generally parents and students are more dissatisfied with all aspects of schooling as they go up higher in the grades from primary to high school (Baenen, 1995; Isenberg, 1992; Warren & Lagomarcino, 1981).

Interestingly, the children of Subjects A and D attend School II. Subjects A and D questioned if it was actually this particular group of teachers that was the problem, or if

their dissatisfaction was due to the nature and of interaction style of junior high teachers generally. Also, Subject A's only other experience with junior high teachers was at a small private girl's school in Nova Scotia. As participants B, D, F and I noted in their responses, it is not fair, for obvious reasons, to compare experiences in private schools with those in the public schools. Subjects A and D also suggested that it was possible that their perceived negative experiences with teachers in this junior high school were actually evidence of other phenomena manifesting themselves. For example, they stated that there were other negative things affecting their children's lives that could account for their children's negative attitude toward the teaching staff overall. In Subject A's words:

I don't like (School II). Maybe it's me, but I find it a one way communication. I tried to say something and it's not that they disagreed with me that mattered but the fact that they disagree with me before they even heard. . . . I will never go to another parent teacher interview there unless I have a big problem as it was a waste of time But again it's not a grade school. . . . She don't like school this year because she doesn't like her teacher. She went to a private school all girls school and loved it. Maybe it's just a part of growing up, and being in junior high. I felt when I go up there that they really don't care what you think. But again it's hard to separate (things). We've moved, the hormones, the thirteen years old. I don't think they are bad teachers. They are just junior high school teachers and a different breed, and I try to sort that out.

It is interesting to note that the teachers described by Subject A above are the same teachers Subject B is describing below. Here are Subject B's words:

Ours (teachers) are pretty good. . . . My Moroccan French experience was pretty crummy for that sort of stuff . . . I've had some excellent experiences with my

oldest daughter's teachers here. Her grade seven and eight teachers (at School II) were really wonderful teachers. They were loving, kind and caring teachers and she really needed gentle handling at the time. She was going through horrendous things. There were a lot of things playing on her and they handled it intelligently. I really think its thanks to them that my daughter has adjusted so well. I've had more positive experiences here than negative. I have also had more positive than negative elsewhere. It depends on the teacher and that could be anywhere. It was the same thing in Montreal and the same thing in Morocco. In the French schools you did not have much contact with the teachers. In was kind of like you deposited your child. It was a different style of teaching.

The diverse perceptions held by Subject A and B illustrate the tenet of the symbolic interaction theory that states that the meaning of events and artifacts are made by individuals, and the meaning one derives is based on one's past and current experiences and history (Blumer, 1969). For example, Subject A's child arrived at School II, from a private girls school which had a low pupil/teacher ratio. In the words of Subject B, who also had experiences with private schools:

Private schools are a different thing all together. Of course you are welcome there. You are paying big bucks.

Subject B's children attended a private American school in Morocco. Her children also attended a school in the Moroccan public school system. She used these words to describe her experiences with teachers there:

My Moroccan French experience was pretty crummy for that sort of stuff.

Subject A, as a result of positive experiences in a private school, arrived at School II with certain expectations. When these expectations were not met, she may have been overly harsh in her judgements and criticisms of the teaching staff. On the other hand, as a result of her negative experiences with Moroccan teachers, Subject B entered School II with different expectations than did Subject A. For example, because of her past experiences she may have expected less than positive interactions with the teaching staff. Consequently, when her experiences with local teachers were more positive than she had anticipated, she may have been overly generous in her evaluation of the teachers at School II.

Question number 6 was included to shed light on the overall quality of teachers this subgroup encountered locally. Here is question number 6:

Tell me about some of the experiences (both positive and negative) you have had with teachers both in Newfoundland and elsewhere.

The responses to this question did not give me the in-depth description I had hoped. This may be because many of the parents had already given ample data on this topic when they earlier responded to question number 1. For example, those who had positive or negative experiences with teachers elaborated on these relevant experiences when answering question number 1. While the quotes in this section contained segments from both question number 1 and question number 6, for the most part they were extracted from the responses to question number 1.

School Administrators

Literature states that effective principals foster a productive working and learning environment (Ryan & Cooper, 1995). Furthermore, studies over the past twenty years examining the characteristics of effective schools have found that principals play an important role (Brookover, 1978; Edmonds, 1979; Murray, 1995; Tesh 1992; Walberg & Haertel, 1990; Zigarmi, 1981). Let me once again briefly outline my research purpose. In this research, I am attempting to discover and describe the perceptions of parents whose children attended schools nationally and internationally on the overall quality of local education in the schools their children have attended in this province. I also want to discover the attributes of education and schooling this parental subgroup deem important in quality education generally. In light of the literature that stresses the importance of administrators in effective schools and quality education, I believe it is crucial to explore this subgroup's views regarding the school administrators in their children's local schools.

When attempting to gain insight into how this parental subgroup judges local school administrators, the research participants were asked to discuss the administrators they have dealt with, in terms of the following: how visible they are within the school; their degree of involvement in the classroom; accessibility; approachability; communication style; their overall expectations of children; and familiarity with children in his or her school. To elicit data on these characteristics, the responses to questions number 1, 7 and 8 were utilized. Then the data was organized in terms of the following: excellent, very good, good, and poor. In addition, parental evaluations of local administrators they

have experienced were organized in terms of above par, on par and below par when compared to school administrators encountered elsewhere. The questions were framed as follows:

Question Number 1:

Compare for me the school (schools) your child (children) now attend with the school (schools) previously attended by talking about some of the following: discipline, home-school communications, attitudes of children toward one another, extra curricular programs and activities, interest level and involvement on the part of administrators, personality and communication style of teachers, parental involvement and so forth.

Question Number 7:

Describe experiences you have had in Newfoundland that make you feel there are some positive things about the local education system.

Question Number 8:

Describe some experiences you have had that have left you feeling that Newfoundland's education system is in need of improvement.

When discussing their perceptions of local administrators five research participants gave the administrators they have encountered in this province an excellent evaluation.

The words of Subject H provide a typical response:

Over at (School V) (Principal) is very involved from what I see and I'm over there all the time. She's always out around. She's always outdoors. She's indoors. She does come into the classes. She lets the kids know what behaviour is acceptable and stuff like that . . . She really tries to get the kids to excel. The kids that are good students and stuff, which may not be fair, she does give recognition to. She really pushes them and they have math competitions over there and she gets involved in all that. I think she's a wonderful principal.

Five participants gave the principals they have experienced in their children's local schools a very good grade. Subject C is a representative voice:

The previous one (one they had the previous year at School I locally) was really out there. (Principal) - I never seen a person like that in my life. This guy was exceptional here because you'd walk in and he had music on, he'd be out in parking lot making sure everyone had hats and mittens. Things like that you don't find too often.

The perceived difference between junior high schools on one hand, and primary and elementary schools on the other hand, emerged again. Subjects A and D judged the primary and elementary administrators at Schools I and IV, as excellent and above par. Their only negative sentiments were toward the administrator of School II, a junior high school. However, they also indicated that their negative perceptions of the principal may stem from phenomena that are often specific to schools at the intermediate level as opposed to primary or elementary schools. In Subject A's words:

Principal at (School IV) . . . fabulous. (School IV's) really good but of course it's an elementary. I found (principal of junior high in School II) ineffective. I'm just so displeased. (Principal) - I just feel he's ineffective, ineffectual.

Overall, six of the twelve participants judged the local administrators in their children's schools as above par when compared with their experiences nationally and internationally. Subject I's voice is representative in this regard:

From Kindergarten to five it (work of the administrator) was excellent. I never seen anything like it before. It is better here than Nova Scotia for kids at the same age. I never seen it in Nova Scotia and I was so surprised when I saw it in the elementary (School). Totally shocked! It was nice to see. In Nova Scotia they were in the office all the time. If you wanted to discuss (something) you had to make an appointment in the private school. I found that here is the only experiences that I have had where I see the administrator.

Three of the twelve participants claimed local administrators in their children's schools were on par with their previous experiences. Subject F is representative of the responses these three participants provided:

Yes, very visible. Very caring, knows the children very well or vaguely. So it's a very positive interaction with the Administration (here) and Montreal as well.

Three research participants stated that they had several previous experiences with administrators that were on par in one instance, and below par in another, when compared with local experiences. For example, Subject H had experiences in two other Canadian provinces. Her local experiences with school administrators were very similar to her experiences in Nova Scotia but better than her experiences in Ontario. These are the words of Subject H:

Over at School V (principal) is very involved from what I see and I'm over there all the time. She's always out around. She's always outdoors. She's indoors. She does come into the classes. She lets the kids know what . . . behavior that is acceptable and stuff like that . . . I think there are about 600 kids there and . . . she talks to them by name and she'll say their name. So she's very involved. Very much so. And . . . she really tries to get the kids to excel. The kids that are good

students . . . she does give recognition to. She really pushes them and they have math competitions over there and she gets involved in all that. I think she's a wonderful principal. In Ontario at . . . , I can't remember his name. I didn't see him very often even though I was there a fair amount. Teachers and things, you know I saw all the time and fairly involved with all the kids. But the principal might come out of the office once and a while for an assembly. Nobody, I never really knew him, didn't know who he was. At [a school] in Nova Scotia the principal was very visible. On field days he was out there playing and all that kind of stuff. He was always out around.

I discovered that three participants judge one local administrator as the best they have experienced anywhere. This is noteworthy as these three parents had experiences in public schools in Nova Scotia, Texas and Scotland. Furthermore, two of these three participants also had experience with private schools in England and Nova Scotia. In conversation with the six participants who had previous experiences in private schools, they claimed that children generally receive the "best of everything" in private schools because parents "pay" for it. Yet locally, there is one administrator that was judged as being the best ever observed, either locally, nationally, or internationally, by two participants who had previous experience with private school education. Subject D's words are helpful here:

In elementary here (last year) he was extremely visible. I don't think you could beat him. He was an excellent principal and the kids will never have anyone like him . . . What he used to do and get up to with the children. He was excellent.

As was the case when judging local teachers, parents whose children attended schools nationally and internationally also judge the local school administrators they have

encountered positively. Furthermore, the research participants believe that effective principals are an important component of quality schools. If this is so, then one again has another indicator that this parental subgroup, based on their local experiences, judges another component of Newfoundland's education system favourably.

School Atmosphere

Academic learning is not possible unless there is a positive atmosphere or environment in a school (Ryan & Cooper, 1995). Research also indicates that most parents today believe that the prevailing atmosphere of a school is very important (Owens, 1995). In light of this literature on the importance of school atmosphere as a component of quality education, I decided to discover and describe the perceptions of parents whose children attended schools nationally and internationally, on the overall atmosphere of the local schools they have encountered. Their analysis of this component of education could provide another avenue for participants to express their views on the overall quality of their local educational experiences. Analysis of the local school environment could also shed some light on whether or not this is an attribute of education that this parental subgroup considers important when judging a school's effectiveness generally.

When attempting to gauge parental perceptions regarding the atmosphere in the local schools their children have attended, I asked question number 4. The responses were organized in terms of the following: excellent, very good, good, and poor. Then the responses were analysed to discover if this parental subgroup perceived the atmosphere of

the local schools they have experienced as above par, on par, or below par when compared to the atmosphere of schools they experienced outside Newfoundland. Question number 4 was presented as follows:

Describe the atmosphere of the school (schools) your child (children) attends here and then describe the atmosphere of the school (schools) your child has previously attended. (In other words, how do you feel, and how do you think your child or children feel, upon going into this school.)

In response to this open-ended question, two research participants stated that the atmosphere in the local primary and elementary schools their children have attended is excellent. One additional participant stated that the atmosphere is excellent in the primary, elementary, and junior high schools her children have attended in this province. Subject D's voice is representative in this regard:

In elementary (School I) extremely welcome. The same in Scotland, extremely welcome but not as much as elementary here When you walk into the elementary here there is a nice feeling, music playing and everything. It's just great They are always doing different things like dressing the school up for St. Patrick's Day They tend to make the children feel kind part of a family and care for each other. In that respect it's excellent. The private school (England) there was no music or anything playing, but you were made welcome. They (children in School I) were extremely accepting of my children when they came to school here On the first day they were both accepted and they were out playing with their new friends and this was bizarre for me In Scotland and England they were accepted well too but not half as quick as here.

Nine respondents stated that the atmosphere was very good in all local schools that they have experienced. Subject L provided a typical response:

My experience (with) junior high is not that in-depth but they have been very warm and receptive and very helpful. In the elementary it is more than welcoming. People know you and always speak to you . . . they are always receptive to parents going in. So it is very warm that way . . . My youngest daughter would go to school every day all year long. I really think it is great . . . In comparison to the other school . . . it was a cliquey thing (in New Brunswick). If you were in the school you were always treated warmly and with respect but you never had that warm cozy feeling (as here) . . . There is a better atmosphere here.

When discussing the atmosphere of their child or children's school or schools, four participants stated that all their local experiences were above par when compared to experiences elsewhere. The six participants who stated that the atmosphere in the local schools their children have attended is very good also stated that the atmosphere in local schools is on par with experiences elsewhere. In Subject C's words:

I feel very comfortable going in. Everyone is very helpful . . . it's warm. Both children are comfortable there. They like to be there 8:30. In Texas it was warm and inviting too. The children all get along very well. We had a neighbour . . . she was Indian. She had a lot of friends. There was no discrimination. In fact she was sad to leave . . . In Texas we had all kinds of kids, we had Mexican, Black. There was no discrimination . . . Everyone got along well there too.

Two participants experienced one school outside Newfoundland with an atmosphere that was as positive as the atmosphere evident in the local schools their children have attended. They also both experienced a school outside Newfoundland with an atmosphere that appeared below par when compared with local experiences.

One participant stated that, based on her experiences, the environment of local schools, from kindergarten to grade twelve, is so positive that she personally believes her

kids are doing better academically, despite weaknesses that might exist in some local curriculum areas. In Subject E's voice:

That is one of the big differences. When they go to school here it's much more relaxed. When I went into my children's school in Texas it was a very stressful atmosphere. . . . I found that my kids came home from school really wound up (after) spending their day in a fairly stressful environment. My kids are really happy here. They are quite enthusiastic about school. You have a lot of positive things. I think just the general family atmosphere that is in the schools. Violence is absolutely not tolerated. The school my kids went to in England wasn't as relaxed an atmosphere but it was certainly safe. The big positive about Newfoundland is that the schools are safe and the kids are happy. I think that overall the academics are not as demanding as in some other places but they are good enough because the atmosphere is so relaxed and safe I think that my children personally do better. Also my children are often put into groups (here) to do a project. And that's teaching children to work together and help other people. and I think that's a good thing. I think that is skills you need to develop. That's what the employers want. You don't go to school as a job training program, but learning to get along. Employers want, people who can work well in...a group situation. They don't want just a super smart person you can't work with.

Research has found that a school's environment or atmosphere makes a difference to academic achievement (Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPortland, Mood, Weinfeld, & York, 1966; Jencks, Smith, Acland, Bane, Cohen, Gintis, Heyns, & Michelson, 1972; Owens, 1995). Schools having a sense of community, in which alienation is reduced and in which a sense of mutual sharing and collegial relationships exist are seen as effective (Owens, 1995). The words of Subject E above verify these two important statements regarding this component of effective schooling.

Subjects A and D provided the only exceptions to the positive perceptions

regarding the atmosphere in the local schools the participants' children have attended. Even though they both described the atmosphere of local primary and elementary schools as excellent, Subjects A and D expressed dissatisfaction with the atmosphere of their child's junior high school (School II). However, Subject E, whose two children attend the same junior high school as Subject D's and A's children, is extremely positive in her judgement of the school atmosphere at School II. Viewing these two different overall perceptions of atmosphere in the same junior high school lend support to Ballentine's (1997) words that people have distinct perceptions of phenomena depending on how they view the world and respond to it.

While Subjects D and B have negative perceptions regarding the atmosphere of their children's junior high school (School II), none of the other participants claimed to have any negative feelings regarding the atmosphere of the local schools their children have attended. Furthermore, none of these participants claimed that they encountered a school outside Newfoundland with a better atmosphere than the atmosphere in the local schools their children have attended. This is important, as the words of Subject E above indicate that this parental subgroup appears to place high value on a positive school atmosphere, and see it as reflecting an important dimension of quality schooling. Furthermore, Subject E clearly reiterated that some parents consider factors other than academic performance as criteria of effective schools. Literature supports this parental subgroup's claim that school atmosphere is very important as researchers have repeatedly found that parents generally place school atmosphere at the top when asked to list their

perceptions of the criteria that make up effective schools (Baenen, 1995; Isenberg, 1992; Murray, 1995). If education can be evaluated this way, the local situation, from this subgroup's perspective, can be judged fairly well overall.

Conclusions to the Chapter

To recap, I set out first and foremost to discover and describe the perceptions of parents whose children attended schools nationally and internationally, on the overall quality of local education based on their experiences in Newfoundland and elsewhere. The second aim of this research is to discover and describe the criteria this parental subgroup values as important when judging the overall quality of schooling and education.

Thus far, the data clearly illustrate that this parental subgroup, based on their experiences, judges the local education system positively overall. They judge the local system fairly well when compared to both public and private systems elsewhere in terms of expectations, academic demands and the curriculum content. The research participants value academics, and want the curriculum basics stressed. However, they also value a well-rounded and broad curriculum that includes the arts, humanities, and physical education. This parental subgroup, based on their local experiences, have high praises for the local music and physical education programs. Because the research participants value these curriculum areas and have had positive experiences with the local music and physical education programs, they judge Newfoundland's education system positively overall.

Literature lends support to this parental subgroup's claim that a well-rounded and broad curriculum are necessary components of a quality education. For example, when asked to state one characteristic they wanted children to possess when they graduated from high school, parents, teachers and school administrators could not choose one as more important than the others (Sarason, 1995; Walker & Soltis, 1986). Furthermore, humanists argue that more than test scores must be considered when evaluating education programs, and student performance in schools (Ballantine, 1993). Finn, Ravitch and Fancher (1984) also lend support to this parental subgroup's claim that they favour a broad and well-rounded curriculum when they state:

An educational system that only strengthens itself in math, science and basic skills risks producing a generation of technopeasants: individuals who manipulate complex machines without knowing why, who depend on other machines for amusement and recreation, who have no real intellectual interests or cultural lives, whose behaviour is defined by the interaction between hedonistic cravings and externally imposed controls, who have no valid bases for judging the claims of politicians, gurus, and cult figures, and who lack any sense of a collective past or any vision of a better future (p.6).

The data also reveal that this parental subgroup apparently values additional educational phenomena not always measurable on standardized test results or on other

verifiable measures. They believe the following attributes are important in education: good home and school communications; opportunities for parental involvement; pleasant, approachable and friendly teachers; visible and involved administrators; and a positive school atmosphere. Because the research participants perceive these attributes of quality schooling to be evident in the local schools they have experienced, they hold positive perceptions of the overall quality of local education.

There is some literature support for this subgroup's perceptions of what constitutes quality education both locally and generally as Hartwig and Ruesch (1994) noted that in the 1990 Annual Gallup Poll, teacher quality, and broad curriculum were very important for over 75 percent of all respondents polled. Also, when analysing parents' perceptions of effective schools it was found that they value the following: teachers with positive attitudes that are beneficial to student performance; good music and physical education programs; teachers and administrators dedicated to doing the best they can within the limits they are presented with; a family orientated and safe learning environment where parents are welcome; and opportunities for parental involvement (Murray, 1995). Furthermore, research has indicated that a school's social and cultural climate and structure may have a significant effect on student achievement (Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer & Wisenbaker, 1979).

Chapter V follows. This chapter will examine the match or mismatch that may be apparent in the data when one compares the provincial government's perceptions as expressed in the education reform documents' perceptions regarding many local

educational issues with the perceptions held by the parental subgroup in this research.

**CHAPTER V: PRESENTATION AND DATA ANALYSIS (PART II): A
COMPARISON OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE PARENTAL SUBGROUP
AND THE EDUCATION REFORM DOCUMENTS**

Introduction to the Chapter

In this chapter, both the provincial education reform documents and the research participants' views on the quality of local education will be examined. First, key aspects of some of the local education reform documents will be summarized. Then the perceptions of the participants, that emerged from the data, will be recapped and further elaborated upon. Upon comparing these two sources of data the third major theme emerges. This third theme is the match or mismatch between the provincial education reform documents and the parental subgroup in this research, regarding the quality of local education. As this theme unfolds, the following sub-topics will be explored: the provincial education reform documents' position on the goals of education and the content of an optimum curriculum; the perceptions of the parental subgroup in this research regarding the goals of education and the content of an optimal curriculum; a comparison of the education reform documents and the views of this parental subgroup, particularly as they pertain to the goals of education and the content of an optimal curriculum; and a theoretical analysis of the parental subgroup and reform documents' perceptions match or mismatch regarding the goals of education and curriculum emphasis.

The Third Theme: Education Reform Documents' Claims and Parental Subgroup's Perceptions of Local Education: An Education Perceptions Match or Mismatch

Introduction

The following section will compare the perceptions of parents whose children attended schools nationally and internationally regarding their local educational experiences with the perceptions of local schooling manifested in the education reform documents. *Specifically, this parental subgroup and the education reform documents' views on the goals of education and the content of the optimum curriculum will be compared.*

The third primary theme emerging from the data is that this group of "newly arrived parents'" perceptions of the quality of the local education system may or may not be different from the perceptions in the education reform documents. Furthermore, this subgroup's outlook on the goals of education and what should comprise the ideal curriculum may be a match or mismatch with the views being promoted in the provincial education reform documents. For example, as was evident earlier, generally this group of "newcomers" appear to want curriculum to be broad and well-rounded. This view may or may not contrast with the education reform documents' perceptions of what should be given priority in a school curriculum.

Education Reform Documents

To again highlight, in this research I have subsumed the agendas of both the business community and provincial government under the category of education reform documents. According to McCann (1995) I may be justified in doing so since he stated that if one analyzes the Board of Trade's submission to the *Royal Commission on Education*, one can see that the similarity of the Board of Trade's position regarding education and the economy are remarkably similar to the provincial government's position.

In this section of Chapter IV, I will focus on the following provincial education reform documents: *Building Our Strengths: Report of the Royal Commission on Employment and Unemployment* (1986); *Education and Labor Market Training: Prerequisite to Economic Development in Newfoundland and Labrador* (1990); *Change and Challenge: A Strategic Economic Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador* (1992); *Our Children, Our Future* (1992); *Adjusting the Course (Part I): Restructuring the School System for Educational Excellence* (November, 1993); *Adjusting the Course (Part II): Improving Conditions for Learning* (1994); *Status Report on the Implementation of the Strategic Economic Plan* (1995); and *Structuring the Educational System: A Public Consolidation paper for Educational Change in Newfoundland and Labrador* (1996).

First, I will present several brief selections from the reform reports which portray the local education system as inadequate and ineffectual. The document, *Adjusting the*

Course (Part 1): Restructuring the School System for Educational Excellence (November, 1993), highlighting the government's commitment to reforming the educational system, states, "our goal for education efforts is to transform this society from one of underachiever to one whose achievement ranks with the best in the nation" (p. 1). The Economic Council of Newfoundland and Labrador report, entitled *Education and Labor Market Training: Prerequisite to Economic Development in Newfoundland and Labrador* (1990), defines the most urgent problems which help to "shed light on the system's poor performance" (p. xii).

In 1990 The Royal Commission on Education was appointed by the Government of Newfoundland to conduct an impartial assessment of the primary, elementary and secondary educational system. While given a broad mandate, the primary focus became the "quality of the educational system." In its document, *Our Children, Our Future* (1992), the Commission focuses on the provincial educational deficiencies:

Educational standards are too low, and that many graduates lack the basic and relevant skills required to function in our present society, let alone the modern, global marketplace that is quickly establishing itself as the economic arena of the future . . . Although such concerns as access, equity, and choice are also important, the key issue fueling the reform momentum is the view that the overall "productivity" of the educational system is insufficient and, specifically, that the educational success rate for students is too low (p. xv).

The Royal Commission (1986a) also concluded that "Newfoundland is failing to provide the province's youth with satisfactory level of education" (p. 215).

Since the eighties, educational influence has shifted from the "education professionals" to the "laity" which generally consists of politicians, and the business community. It seems as if, for the first time in our history, the business of schooling is becoming redefined in relation to its "customers." Restructuring is facilitating unprecedented inroads of market forces into the governance and organization of schools (Murphy, 1992). In an attempt to understand the difference between the perceptions that emerge from the data, and those that emerge from the provincial education reform documents one has to first understand that for local politicians' the term customer does not include parents or taxpayers, but only the business community.

Many factors affect perception, and diverse people have distinct perceptions of phenomena depending on how they view the world and respond to it. (Ballantine, 1997). The validity of this statement is obvious when one views how the provincial education reform documents, and subsequent educational policies, have been inadvertently influenced by the provincial government and business community's views regarding the province's economic troubles.

An examination of government reports, or government commissioned documents, reveals that the government officials' notion of customer is clearly the business community rather than parents and students. Government reports, from the Royal Commission Reports on employment and unemployment from 1986 onwards have taken

the ideological stand that the failure of the provincial economy is due to deficiencies in the education system (Canning, 1993). This pessimistic outlook has been backed by the business community. For example, the Board of Trade concluded that provincial deficiencies in education have produced graduates who do not have the skills needed in the marketplace. Instead they have poorly developed work and study habits, and are not highly motivated (Business News, 1991a). The board also expressed concerns that “compared to other Canadian provinces, Newfoundland has the lowest level of educational attainment and the lowest level of economic performance” (Business News, 1990b, p. 26) and therefore, “our existing education system is not meeting the demands of our current economy” (Business News, 1991a, p. 6). To remedy this situation, “the overriding priority of education should be “quality” - not accessibility at any cost” (Business News, 1991b, p. 26).

In response to the stance that Newfoundland’s economic woes are due to the poor education system, the proposition has emerged that the economic picture can only improve if the local education system improves. This improvement is only possible if the needs of “business,” become priority, and the system subsequently produces students who fulfill the needs of the business customer. The Royal Commission’s Report (1994) on Education contains recommendations reflecting policy directives on education and the economy. For example, the Commission stressed that in a local curriculum emphasis be placed on language, science, math, and technology in schools in an effort to improve business growth and economic development (pp. i-ii).

The commission's reasoning seems to follow the logic of the human capital theory. This theory has been common in the comparative field of education since the 1960s. The human capital theory stresses that there is a relationship between education and economic growth and development. This perspective also points to the importance of education in transforming individuals' beliefs, values and behaviors into those necessary for economic modernization (Ballantine, 1997). According to this, individuals become like pieces of machinery, or other capital goods, that can increase their value in the labor market by increasing their education, especially training in occupational skills (Ballantine, 1997; Becker, 1993; Bowles & Gintis, 1976). The government appointed Royal Commission on Education (1986a), appears to have been endorsing the human capital theory when it stated that:

From fishing outports we have to create, not welfare ghettos, but modern forms of enterprise, so as to achieve a new kind of self-reliance appropriate to the post-industrial age. If we are to achieve this, modern villages will need to experience a revolution in the education of their citizens (p. 19).

While the Royal Commission on Education was established to analyze issues relating to employment and unemployment in Newfoundland, its main focus became reforming the education system as a prerequisite to employment and general economic improvements (Arruda, 1997). This perspective was reiterated in the Government of

Newfoundland and Labrador's documents entitled *Change and Challenge: A Strategic Economic Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador* (1992) and *Status Report on the Implementation of the Strategic Economic Plan* (1995). Within these documents it is obvious that the government had reservations about the ability of the current structure of the education system to meet these challenges. Since education was viewed as critical to economic development, the provincial reform documents saw it as essential that fundamental reforms be enacted to bring about the education system needed to create the kind of economy that is envisioned for economic prosperity (Arruda, 1997).

The document *Adjusting the Course* (Part I) (1993), highlighted the government's commitment to reforming the education system in order to improve the level of human capital in Newfoundland. It stated that the goal of education reform is to raise educational quality and attain higher levels of educational performance in order to improve the provincial economy. Also, in *Structuring the Educational System: A Public Consultation Paper for Educational Change in Newfoundland and Labrador* (1996), the government outlined its continuing direction for education reform. Here it was noted that the context for change was determined by the need to produce the highest quality education possible in order for Newfoundland students to become economically competitive on the "world stage" (Arruda, 1997).

To repeat, the provincial education reform documents view the business community as the customer needing to be satisfied with the quality of the "product" emerging from the provincial education system. Consequently, these provincial reform

documents define education as little more than a means to increase the store of human capital as an investment in economic growth. Also, the data provided earlier by parents of children who have attended schools nationally and internationally as well as locally reveal that while this subgroup considers preparation for the work force as a vital component of education, it is merely one of many goals they deem important.

Part of the government's call for reform, as a means of improving the so-called inefficiencies and ineffectiveness of the local schooling system, also involves a change in curriculum focus. Usually the opinions of the clients of the school, that is students, parents and taxpayers, are not considered when curriculum change is proposed (Pratt, 1989; Stewin & McCann, 1993). In Canada curriculum change comes about largely by accretion, and through a process that is primarily political (Stewin & McCann, 1993). Unfortunately political solutions will not solve non-political problems.

But there are alternatives. Sweden and New Zealand have based major curriculum reforms on wide-ranging assessments and surveys of public opinion (Stewin & McCann, 1993). This approach may be beneficial locally as Gallup Polls in the U. S. and Canada show that the general public is interested in schools and are concerned about the quality of education. Also, it is fundamental that the views of parents and the general public be considered when deciding education curriculum, for in a democracy the education system must reflect the people's will. The people must feel empowered by their education system. They must feel a sense of participation, of ownership, of responsiveness, and this sense must be well founded (Stewin & McCann, 1993).

Despite all the literature supporting the necessity for parental input, the views of parents and taxpayers are generally not often welcome in Canada when curriculum issues are being debated or decided (Allen, 1992; Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Stewin & McCann, 1993). When we compare the voice of the parental subgroup outlined earlier, with the position outlined by the authors of the education reform documents, it becomes obvious that these two groups possess very different views of curriculum priorities in education. Therefore, it seems the claim by Ryan and Cooper (1995), that different individual perceptions of, and judgements about, what makes successful schools, often vary enormously, is indeed valid.

Perceptions of Parental Subgroup

To again highlight for comparison sake, parents of children who attended schools nationally and internationally as well as locally appear to have a preference for an education system that exposes children to many curriculum areas - the academics, the arts, humanities, and physical education. Their justification, whether eloquently expressed, or simply implied in the interviews, finds support in theoretical literature reviewed in Chapter II and earlier in this data analysis. Also, after a poll of a group of fifth and sixth grade parents taken in the U. S., it was suggested that perhaps present notions of curriculum emphasis should be reconsidered and attention should focus on developing a well-rounded curriculum (Evans & Weible, 1982).

The reasons for advocating a well-rounded curriculum are many, and varied. The arts are essential to the education of a well-rounded individual (Bess & Fisher, 1993). If people in the twenty-first century are to achieve fulfilment from being and doing, rather than getting and having, more attention will have to be given to the arts in school (Stewin & McCann, 1993). Furthermore, advocates of music education claim it has a positive effect on everything from academic achievement to self-discipline. In 1919, Will Earhart, president of Music Supervisors National Conference, argued that music enhances knowledge in the areas of math, science, geography, history, foreign languages, physical education and vocational training (Morrison, 1994).

It is argued that physical education programs are more than physical fitness. They teach goals that can be practiced in life for the long term. For example, the acquisition of values such as teamwork, cooperation, and respect for the rights of others are desired outcomes (Ryan & Cooper, 1995).

There is no worthy education that does not include the teaching and learning of humanities. Besides being important as subjects within themselves, languages, philosophy, classics, social studies, and other humanities, especially history and literature, are useful in the development of the skills of comprehension, evaluation, criticism, and writing. The study of the humanities serves as a guide both to better self-knowledge and to a keener appreciation of the achievements of our culture and civilization. The humanities are not a luxury. The humanities are basic (Bennett, 1984; Finn, Ravitch & Fancher, 1984).

There are numerous and diverse theoretical and parental arguments, especially on

the part of parents whose children have attended schools locally as well as nationally and internationally, for the inclusion of the arts and humanities in education. The views of this parental subgroup give credence to literature that indicates that the measures and indicators parents use to make assessments of their children's schools are often substantially different from those sometimes used by others in the community (Schlechty, 1997). This is obvious when one compares the perceptions of "optimum curriculum" outlined in the provincial education reform documents and by the parental subgroup in this research. For example, the parents in this research favour an education system that is broad and well-rounded. However, the reform documents indicate that there is a distinct possibility the importance of all curriculum areas beyond those traditionally viewed as academic may be eroded in future (Dundas, 1997).

As outlined before, the data in this research indicate that the research participants want their children to have a broad education - one that exposes them to music, art, physical education, and the humanities. Again, the comments below illustrate that parents want their children's education to be more than achieving excellent outcomes in core subjects, in hope of *increasing employment prospects*. Some of the additional educational outcomes they believe to be important are: producing a well-rounded and broadly educated person; exposure to a wide range of subject areas such as the sciences, humanities, arts and physical education; provision of the opportunity to discover one's aptitude and talents, or areas of interest; the development of good social and interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, and work-related skills; and the improvement of self-esteem and

overall level of personal contentment. Subject J's and G's responses are helpful here:

I would never want to see any of the programs that they offer (now) cut because from experience, especially at School III (my son) is getting is a well-rounded program. There is a lot of emphasis put on, not just academics, but on the whole development of the child, (Subject J).

I think school is a combination of different things and I feel all these things are important (referring to music, art, religion, French, physical education etc.) These things are extremely important Schools, you know, you got to take a holistic approach It bothers me when we get into cutbacks and we lose some of these frills, but I don't think they are frills. To me they are very important There are all sorts of different components (to education). I guess we want kids to come out of school being well adjusted, being able to deal with people, and hopefully to have a good work ethic, (Subject G).

In conclusion, it appears that the parents in this research support literature that states that parents want a curriculum that is broad and well-rounded (Baenan, 1995; Evans & Weible, 1982; Isenberg, 1992; Schlechty, 1997; Sconyers, 1996).

Conflicting Perceptions: An Overview

This section will begin by reviewing the provincial education reform documents' perceptions of the optimal curriculum. Then the research participants' views regarding the optimal curriculum will be outlined.

The document *Learning for All: The Foundation Report* (1996), received input from Department of Education officials, Memorial University's Faculty of Education,

school board officials, and teachers. It acknowledged one of the main concerns of the parental subgroup in this study: The school curriculum needs to be broad and eclectic in an attempt to educate the whole child (Dundas, 1997). In addition, in *Our Children, Our Future* (1992), it was stated that the school is “expected to attend to the full development of the whole child - cognitively, physically, morally, spiritually, socially, and emotionally (p. 215). Yet, an examination and reexamination of *Our Children, Our Future*, (1992), and other education reform documents reveals that the provincial government does not fully endorse this educational perspective.

According to Nicholls, Patashnick and Nolan, (1985) and Thorkildsen (1988) different goals correspond to different world-views and, in particular, different perceptions about education. The validity of this statement reveals itself when one closely compares the comments of the research participants and the provincial education reform documents that emphasize the optimal curriculum for provincial schools in future. Again, it is not my intention to go into a detailed analysis of the local education reform documents, but to try to provide general insight into the education reform documents’ perceptions on the future curriculum needs of this province’s children.

In keeping with today’s educational push to return to the basics, the authors of the government commissioned report *Our Children, Our Future*, (1992) state:

The commission therefore believes that a core curriculum must be established based on the disciplines of language, mathematics, and science, and that high

standards of achievement in these studies must become a primary aim of the curriculum (p. 300).

The reform documents appear to be operating on the premise that a concentration on mathematics, science, and language is the best and most efficient way to educate students to meet the demands of the future provincial workforce. Consequently, in the education reform documents there appears to be an emphasis on certain subjects, and a lowering in status of others. This is evident in the use of the terminology “primary core,” “secondary core” and, “non-core” when referring to the diverse curriculum areas. The use of such terms indicates that social studies, fine arts, music and physical education will become secondary in importance as they are categorized as secondary core (*Adjusting the Course (Part II)*, 1994, p. 18).

Because of lack of reference to curriculum areas outside those designated primary core in the current education reform documents, many are left pondering the future role, if any, of the secondary core and non-core subjects in the school curriculum (Cantwell, 1995; Dundas, 1997). For example, according to Cantwell (1995), out of the two hundred and eleven recommendations on the future direction of education in the document *Our Children, Our Future* (1992), none mention the arts. At the time of her research, Dundas (1997) claimed that there was no official representative for the visual arts and theatre arts at the department level. Dundas (1997), also found that there has been recent years when the Department of Education and school boards have not employed music consultants.

In this study on the perceptions of parents whose children were educated nationally and internationally, more attention has been given to music than other arts and the humanities because this curriculum area received nothing but “rave reviews” from the parental subgroup in this research. The participants also believe that all aspects of the present music program in this province should be a vital curriculum component in all schools. *If one carefully examines the words of this parental subgroup, it is obvious that the reasons they want music in the school curriculum require little interpretation and elaboration on my part. Their arguments also find support in the literature cited in Chapter II and earlier in this chapter. The voice of respondents A, C, B, L, G and K are helpful here:*

... I think it is important for the children who aren't good at other things ... I just find it's (the music programs) in the school here, and in Nova Scotia they had to go out. In Nova Scotia you had to have the car, resources, lack stress level, time etc. but here it's just so easy ... Music ... really enhances the school, (Subject A).

I think it's good, very good as people have to be well rounded ... Children also need that (music), not just the academics ... They also need that because it's a break from the academics ... It gives everyone a chance to shine, (Subject C).

...I also believe that the band program is a wonderful academic. I don't consider it a frill ... I think that school teams are important. They add a tightness to a school body ... The music program adds a tightness to a school program because you get school bands which is another school team, (Subject B).

I've got two children who enjoy it, (Subject L). Some kids, who may have trouble coping with the rigors of academia, may excel at some of these other programs (like music), (Subject G).

How do you know you like to sing unless you can sing or someone tells you or shows you how to do something, (Subject K)?

Despite the research participants' high approval of the provincial music programs they have encountered, the Newfoundland government appears unclear regarding its stand on the future status of music and all other subjects they refer to as secondary core in the reform documents. Some claim that statements such as "the goal of all changes is to bring about a substantial improvement in the quality of education provided to students, and to increase the current low student achievement to a level that ranks with the best in Canada" (*Adjusting the Course: Part II*, 1994, p.1), clearly indicates that the reform documents view the primary function of schools as intellectual and academic (Brockerville, 1995; Dundas, 1997).

The following statement is taken directly from an education reform document:

There is little dispute on over the importance of language, math and science. However, there is less common agreement on subjects such as second language, social studies, music and religion and a variety of other subjects (*Adjusting the Course: Part II*, 1994, p. 17-18).

This statement further illustrates the mismatch between the education reform documents in this province and the parental subgroup in this research, regarding curriculum emphasis. The local reform documents appear to recognize the importance of language, math and science but are ambiguous regarding their position regarding other curriculum areas that many believe should be given priority in Newfoundland's schools. The research

participants also acknowledge the importance of language and math. However, they appear to strongly agree that other subject areas are very important as schools should offer a broad curriculum and produce well-rounded individuals.

In conclusion, literature states that parents want a say in their child's education (Baker & Stevenson, 1990; Ballantine, 1993; Charles, 1989; Ross, 1994; Sarason, 1995; Schlechty, 1997). Parents want to choose the school their children attend, and choose the pedagogy and curriculum offered in those schools (Baker & Stevenson, 1990; Ballantine, 1993; Charles, 1989). Furthermore, literature by Baenan (1995), Evans and Weible (1982), Isenberg (1992), Schlechty (1997), and Sconyers (1996) supports the data that stress that this parental subgroup wants a curriculum that is broad and well-rounded. If these statements are valid, then it would appear that the future direction for curriculum implied in the provincial education reform documents runs contrary to some of the beliefs and values held by the parents in this research and the literature.

Theoretical Analysis of Parental Subgroup's and Reform Documents' Perceptions

Mismatch

This section of Chapter V will provide a theoretical analysis of the apparent mismatch between the perceptions of local education evident in the provincial education reform documents and the research participants. To explain this apparent mismatch the symbolic interaction theory is utilized. Symbolic interactionism states that meanings are

made and that we need to understand our commonsense views of reality (Roberts, 1991).

It seems clear from the discussion presented so far in this chapter that parents of children educated nationally and internationally as well as locally and the education reform documents differ regarding their views on what should be deemed as important in education curriculum. Theoretical perspectives are used to provide logical explanations for why things happen the way they do and serve as a guide or perception of how the social world works (Ballantine, 1997). One perspective that may help make sense of these different perceptions regarding what should be included in the curriculum is the symbolic interaction theory.

The symbolic interactionist perspective stresses the need to understand our commonsense views of reality and how we come to view reality as we do (Ballentine, 1997; DeMarrais & LeCompte, 1995). Symbolic interactionists are concerned with how meanings are made (DeMarrais & LeCompte, 1995; Munch, 1994). The meaning of an object is not inherent or characteristic to that object. Rather, it is determined by the actor and by others' recognition and acknowledgement of the actors' meaning attribution, which contributes to the continuation of the meaning ascribed to that object (Munch, 1994). Symbolic interactionism states that people communicate by using symbols that stand for something else, or convey a message or meaning (DeMarrais & LeCompte, 1995).

However, symbols can be confusing because they have multiple meanings, which can differ from person to person, group to group, and culture to culture (DeMarrais & LeCompte, 1995; Bennett & LeCompte, 1990). I believe that this tenet of symbolic

interactionism helps one understand how the education reform documents have taken standardized test scores and made them a symbol of the need for local reform. As stated in the literature review, *an analysis of the provincial government's education reform* documents clearly illustrates that the use of standardized tests results is a prominent and widespread factor when justifying local education reform. However, critics may argue that poor standardized test scores represent the provincial government's economic and social incompetence in governing this province (Kazemak, 1988; Weiner, 1990).

Writers, from Dewey to present day, have expressed opposition to the notion that there is any linear relationship between education and the economy (Barlow & Robinson, 1994; Hough, 1987; Kazemak, 1988; McCann, 1994; Murnane, 1988; Weiner, 1990; Wotherspoon, 1998). They have taken a position in direct opposition to the provincial education reform documents and instead argue that education can only improve if political and economic conditions improve (Kazemak, 1988; Weiner, 1990). However, it appears as if this position has not been seriously considered by the local political and business community even though local submissions were made to the education reform committees outlining this very viewpoint (Arruda, 1997).

Despite the general criticisms of standardized test scores, it is clear that they have served as a monitor of educational achievement and have served as a powerful tool for local education reform. It seems that standardized assessment is central to the current education reform debate as assessment results have been relied upon to document the need for change. For example, national and international comparisons of students' academic

performance have been used locally to suggest that the provincial economic decline is due to the poor academic performance of students (Arruda, 1997).

The provincial government has used standardized test scores, especially the Canadian Test of Basic Skills, as symbols of the need for educational change (Arruda, 1997). However, parents of children who have attended schools outside Newfoundland as well as locally make little reference to standardized scores during discussions on the quality of the local education system and the indicators of quality education. Furthermore, the three research participants who mentioned standardized test scores stated that they do not believe the scores of local students are poor or below standard. One parent even questioned the validity of the local notion that the standardized test scores of Newfoundland's students are substandard. This parental subgroup also stated that they consider the provincial scores good in light of this province's dismal economic picture and the often misguided political and educational policies of the provincial government. The voice of Subjects C, D and G are helpful in this respect:

I've seen the scores and it's not that bad compared to places that have more money, (Subject C).

Do our National tests say we perform worse than other students? How can you say the education here is not comparable to other places when we perform at the same level as they do Test results show that academically we are not offering (programs) any worse than on the Mainland. Although I keep hearing education is not good down here in Newfoundland I don't know where that comes from. That fallacy! . . . Why are we worse? We have a National curriculum. I think what is worse is educational trends . . . They (Government) initiate it without thoroughly investigating it. That's why we have serious problems with the

initiation of the whole language approach . . . The teachers were saying it doesn't work . . . But it was insisted on by . . . the Department of Education and the school boards . . . Schools should have more say in the curriculum and how it is presented. Teachers don't have enough say in that, (Subject B).

We hear all sorts of various statistics quoted . . . and a lot of times you are comparing those kinda of statistics against Canadian or North American Stats and it is like comparing apples and oranges. I have to question anyone saying we are worse off. I am sure there are many areas we can improve in . . . things are getting better . . . It really boiled me a few years ago when people in our own provincial government and the Department of Education, you know the honorable (Minister of Education) and Company, crapping all over education . . . at the famous math conference . . . Anyway, I am sure there are areas we can improve, as there is in every school. It's the same in other places too . . . They got their challenges . . . I went to Edmonton . . . (they said) they were going through rough times compared to the glory days of the eighties. But it was still pretty good compared to Newfoundland. I think we are doing a damn good job . . . I mean a lot of the time we have perceptions of Newfoundland education . . . not doing as well as everyone else . . . I don't think that is true. I think it needs to be said that there are some good things. Newfoundland education, (for) the last . . . thirteen (years) it's been dump on Newfoundland education and dump on teachers, (Subject G).

Using the symbolic interaction theory it seems that this parental subgroup holds perceptions unlike those perceptions evident in the provincial education reform documents as they do not see standardized test scores as the main barometer when evaluating the local education system. No doubt the parental subgroup in this study views standardized test scores as symbolic of achievement level. But for these parents high standardized test scores are only one of many other factors which reflect achievement. This provides credence to Robert's (1991) contention that symbolic interactionists believe that individuals act towards objects according to the meaning objects have for them.

As stated in the literature review in Chapter II, Wynne (1981) and Ryan and

Cooper (1995) have identified many important criteria of effective and ineffective schools after completing a ten-year study. It is clear that participants in this study utilize, consciously or unconsciously, many of the factors identified by these researchers when assessing the effectiveness of local schools. As indicated in the literature review, the measures of school success for parents is not only scores on achievement tests, but rather a more holistic view of the outcomes of schooling. For the research participants some of the features were: good home and school communications; parental involvement; an environment or atmosphere of kindness, friendship, and support; administrative visibility and involvement; and a broad curriculum and other such factors.

This parental subgroup has chosen these symbols as representative of school performance and success because they understand their importance in the academic, social and personal lives of their children. According to Kay and Roberts (1994) and Sarason (1995), research indicates that based on their experiences and interactions with their children, parents have knowledge concerning the conditions and factors necessary for academic, social, and personal academic growth and achievement in the school setting. The words of Subject E eloquently summarize how a school's positive atmosphere is a symbol of quality schooling for her family. Here are Subject E's own words:

That is one of the big differences. When they go to school here it's much more relaxed. When I went into my children's school in Texas it was a very stressful atmosphere . . . I found that my kids came home from school really wound up (after) spending their day in a fairly stressful environment. My kids are really happy here. They are quite enthusiastic about school. You have a lot of positive things. I think just the general family atmosphere that is in the school.

Violence is absolutely not tolerated. The school my kids went to in England wasn't as relaxed an atmosphere but it was certainly safe. The big positive about Newfoundland is that the schools are safe and the kids are happy. I think that overall the academics are not as demanding as in some other places but they are good enough because the atmosphere is so relaxed and safe I think that my children personally do better. Also my children are often put into groups (here) to do a project. And that's teaching children to work together and help other people. and I think that's a good thing. I think that is skills you need to develop. That's what the employers want. You don't go to school as a job training program, but learning to get along. Employers want, people who can work well in . . . a group situation. They don't want just a super smart person you can't work with.

The data in this research clearly illustrate that the participants do not support the provincial education reform documents' position that high standardized test scores are the main measure of educational achievement or quality education. *The literature review in Chapter II* also provides evidence that parents in Newfoundland, and in many parts of Canada and the United States, do not share the politicians and business community's alarm over the poor state of education (Arruda, 1997; Graesser, 1988; Warren, 1983; Willie, 1987). Instead, those not satisfied with the provincial education system are in top government and business positions in society (Arruda, 1997). The question now emerges as to why standardized test scores have been put to the forefront as the symbol of education underachievement in the provincial education reform documents.

Durkheim (1977) observed that education has taken very different forms at different times and places, showing that we cannot separate the education system from society, for they reflect each other. Economic growth is an imperative in all sectors of modern society, and is often what motivates many government policies and practices. According to Schumacher (1974):

Economics plays a central role in shaping the activities of the modern world. *in as much as it supplies the criteria of what is 'economic' and what is 'uneconomic,' and there is no other set of criteria that exercise a greater influence over the actions of individuals and groups, as well as over those of government (p.33).*

This is true locally as improving educational achievement is apparently viewed as a means of improving economic growth in the reform documents. The impetus of the reform movement did not evolve solely from public dissatisfaction with the education system. Instead, the reform movement *became firmly rooted in a period of high support for the existing system among the general population (Arruda, 1997).* However, it seems that because of the province's continual economic difficulties the government needed to find something representative of the causes of the province's dismal economic reality. Thus, standardized test scores became the symbol linking poor economic productivity to a *so-called inefficient and ineffectual education system.*

Symbolic interactionism may also provide insight into why the provincial government has been able to successfully use standardized test scores as a symbol of the need for education reform as a means of improving local economic woes. Symbolic interactionism maintains that *meanings change in the course of interaction* with others. As stated earlier, when the current education reform movement in this province was born, the general population of this province was happy with education results (Arruda, 1997). Yet the government, over the course of a decade, was able to get unanimous support for its proposal calling for a complete overhaul of the education system. *If symbolic*

interactionists are correct, then one can assume that the beliefs and values of the people of Newfoundland changed as a result of their interactions with those already under the influence of the government's social policy and negative views of the education system in this province.

However, parents whose children attended schools nationally and internationally as well as locally paint a positive picture of local education as they have not been in Newfoundland long enough to allow their interactions with others to influence the meaning of given educational phenomena. Also, symbolic interactionists would contend that the participants' views may be different because, having recently transferred to this province, they bring their own notions of what constitutes good education and respond according to the particular set of expectations they bring to the situation (Roberts, 1991).

Conclusions to the Chapter

In conclusion, one must remember that while standardized measures of educational outcomes are crucial, different customers and stakeholders want and need different kinds of results from the same organization. We must therefore be prepared to measure different things, as well as to measure the same things in different ways. For example, parents generally want their children to be happy and to do well in school. Thus, unlike the business community and government, if their children are doing well and are happy, an overall drop in local test scores will not be too distressing for them. However, if overall

performance rises, while their children's scores decline, they will be more concerned (Schlechty, 1997).

This does not mean that standardized test scores are not important. Instead, the point is, that education systems cannot be assessed *with a single measure or even multiple* measures of a single thing. The voice of parents whose children have attended schools nationally and internationally as well as locally, appear to imply that multiple measures of multiple things are necessary when assessing the quality of an education system. *Unfortunately*, this sometimes escapes the attention of local officials when formally assessing schools' performance and academic outcomes in this province.

In the following chapter the two secondary themes emerging from the data will be presented.

**CHAPTER VI: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS (PART III):
STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF LOCAL EDUCATION; AND
EDUCATIONAL VALUES ARE VERY INDIVIDUALISTIC**

Introduction to the Chapter

Two secondary themes emerged from the research data. The first *secondary theme* will examine whether or not the research participants identified specific “strengths” and “weaknesses” *in the local education system* they experienced. When exploring this theme the following areas of a curriculum will be discussed: music, physical education, language arts, special education/remedial education, mathematics, science, fine art, and multiculturalism. Student discipline in the local schools the research participants have experienced will also be discussed.

Finally, the second minor theme evident in the voice of the research participants will be outlined. This theme is that parental values may or may not be very individualistic. During the discussion of this theme the following topics will be examined: parental views on what should comprise school curriculum; place and role of religion in the curriculum; the place and role of French in the curriculum; and place and role of extracurricular activities in schools.

The First Secondary Theme: Strengths and Weaknesses of Local Education

Introduction

Parents who have transferred to Newfoundland generally believe, based on their experiences, that the local education system is good, or at least comparable to other systems they have experienced nationally and internationally. However, when it comes to the “specifics” of local schooling there is a very broad range of opinions regarding curriculum. For example, while Subject C claimed that the local physical education program was really good in the school her children attend, Subject D stated that this curriculum area is in great need of improvement. Also, Subject D claimed that the local mathematics programs she has encountered are extremely demanding. However, Subject E stated that this is the one curriculum area that needs to be more challenging. Despite a wide range in opinion regarding some curriculum areas, careful analysis of the data indicates that generally there are some areas that stand out as strengths and other areas that can be classified as weaknesses of local education in the schools the participants’ children have attended. The data for this section was derived from the responses to all twelve open-ended questions guiding the interviews. The terms used to organize the data will be elaborated on if and when necessary.

Strengths of Local Education

Introduction

Data on the strengths of local education exemplified in the schools the participants' children have attended emerged in the responses to many of the interview questions. However, question number 7 was specifically included to obtain data on this topic. Question Number 7:

Describe experiences you have had in Newfoundland that have made you feel there are some positive things about the local education system.

As was evident earlier, parents of children who were educated nationally and internationally generally like the quality of local education. One of the main reasons for this positive assessment is the broadness of the local curriculum. For example, the research participants react positively to both the quality and quantity of the music and physical education programs offered in the provincial schools their children have attended. In this section, a brief summarization of the comments made earlier regarding these two curriculum areas are presented. Then the other areas perceived as strengths of the local curriculum are examined.

Music

One of the characteristics of an effective school is the ability to offer programs beyond the basics, such as music and orchestra (Ryan & Cooper, 1995). This statement reflects positively on the local situation as all research participants agree that the quality of the provincial music programs they have encountered are unmatched elsewhere. Subject A's and C's responses are representative of the voice of others:

I think the music program here is spectacular. I find it beyond belief . . . The music is exceptional, (Subject A).

Music is strong here, very strong. In California, Colorado or Texas the music just wasn't as strong as here in Newfoundland, within the schools, (Subject C).

Physical Education

As indicated earlier, the local physical education programs evident in the six schools the research participants' children have attended are highly praised by many parents. The following excerpts, two of which were presented previously, are typical in this regard:

Phys. ed is very good here . . . It was fairly good there (Texas) but I find it a lot stronger here. He does a lot more with them, games and really gives them a good work out. I really like that. (He's) not just teaching basketball, playing ball . . . It

(phys. ed) is strong here, (Subject C).

Physical education. Over at (School V) great! They get it three times a cycle. And the teacher over there is great. The kids love it. They love her. She is great with the kids . . . They do a lot of stuff with music. They'll go in and learn how to do jigs and things. They are into gymnastics now, so (teacher) always has the tape recorder going while they are doing that. They don't always have to necessarily do set things. Once she teaches them set things . . . they are allowed to do their own routine and things like that. So they have a very good balance . . . but still they have a great phys. ed program. I'm pretty pleased with the program, (Subject H).

Phys. ed here is . . . excellent because . . . they (New Brunswick) didn't have a full time phys. ed teacher, whereas here they do. They (the home room teacher) would do what they could do with the children. They weren't necessarily learning basketball or gymnastics or whatever on an outgoing basis . . . They might have two or three phys. ed. classes per week, taught by the home room teacher, and the second week they might have one taught by the gym teacher and so on. The phys. ed teachers were just basically hired by the district and then would rotate around to different schools, (Subject L).

Language Arts

Language arts programs seek to develop in the child the skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening, as well as a knowledge of culture as represented in literature. The importance of language arts cannot be overemphasized since no subject can be successfully studied without adequate language skills (Ryan & Cooper, 1995). Language arts is obviously important to student achievement. Therefore, I believe it is important to gain an understanding of the perceptions of the research participants regarding the local language arts programs in the schools their children have attended. Furthermore, I believe

it is also important to examine whether this is a curriculum area parents value when assessing the quality of education.

Data on the local language arts programs in the schools this parental subgroup have been affiliated with was provided in the responses to question number 7, dealing specifically with the strengths of local education. Data also emerges in the responses to questions number 2, 11 and 12. The data pertaining to language arts in local schools was organized in terms of the following: excellent, very good, and good. The data was then analysed to determine if the research participants believed that the local language arts programs they have encountered were above par or on par when compared to language arts programs outside this province. The relevant questions were framed as follows:

Question Number 7:

Describe experiences you have had in Newfoundland that make you feel there are some positive things about the local education system.

Question Number 11:

As a result of your experiences with education, schools and teachers, how do you feel Newfoundland's system rates when compared to your experiences elsewhere? Is it better, worse or the same overall?

Question Number 12:

How would you respond to the statement that the overall education system in Newfoundland is inferior to the education system, or systems, your child or children, have experienced in other provinces and countries?

Question Number 2:

Tell me how you rate the academic demands of your child's (children) present and previous school both in terms of school work and homework expectations.

Two respondents stated that the local language arts programs they have

experienced are excellent. In addition, two participants judged the local programs they have experienced as very good. Thus, one third of the twelve participants believe the local language arts programs in their children's schools are either excellent or very good.

Subject D's and C's words are helpful:

The language program here is excellent . . . The youngest will be excellent when she goes back because she's gotten that here . . . She's gonna go back to Scotland and have no problem with her English because it's that good . . . There is emphasis on story writing. I mean she'll sit and write stories, (Subject D).

It's pretty good. In . . . Kindergarten, I couldn't believe the . . . little books they were reading. And in grade one too, they are getting a sufficient amount to do. You know, writing sentences like maybe doing a little story . . . The Language Arts program here is excellent, (Subject C).

Eight participants stated that the language arts programs are good in the local schools they have experienced. Furthermore, out of the twelve participants, only two expressed any complaints about the language arts programs in their children's local schools. These criticisms were in the area of grammar. However, two other respondents claimed that the stress on grammar is one of the positive aspects of the local language arts programs they have encountered. The words of Subjects B and H illustrate two very diverse parental perceptions regarding the emphasis on grammar in two different schools within the city:

The schools are now teaching grammar. We have new English programs in with

this Communicating Skills Program . . . The basis premise of the book is good. I find that kids need the grammar, (Subject B). I think they could be doing more grammar. I find like they'll come home and they'll have these big projects . . . to do and they'll do them . . . but . . . I'll have to really go through the capital letters . . . I don't find that they do real grammar with them . . . even with spelling . . . the grammar exercises in it, they haven't done anything since December . . . It's partly a teacher thing. I think they should have to do it because kids are growing up and going to University and they don't know how to write anything and they don't know how to express themselves, and . . . put it on paper . . . grammatically, (Subject H).

This diversity of experience with local language arts programs may not be solely the result of different parental perceptions of the same phenomena. Instead it may result from the fact that different teachers and different schools tend to put different emphasis on different curriculum areas and skills, depending on what they perceive as the needs of students, the school, or a particular grade (Jalongo & Stamp, 1997).

Five respondents claimed that the local language arts programs they have experienced are better overall than the language arts programs they encountered in the previous schools their children attended nationally and internationally. In Subject K's words:

I found when we moved here, my son went into grade four and he was probably about six months, maybe more, behind in his Language Arts due to no fault of his own but due to the academic standards in Edmonton verses the academic standards here. They seemed to be more advanced in the Language Arts here in St. John's . . . I have had that somewhat confirmed by speaking to teachers . . . Language arts has a definite impact on everything else that you do . . . The homework that he brought home was excessive . . . but . . . only . . . because he hadn't been taught the skills to do it. I'll give you an example. The book reports expected of him in grade three in Edmonton were basically photocopied statements. He would have to fill in the blanks. He did not know how to sit down and say, "Okay, I've read this book. What was it about?" He didn't start reading .

... until the middle of grade one. When we were in Edmonton, kindergarten was at the pre school level ... The Kindergarten program here is far more demanding in that (daughter) is currently counting to 50, and number recognition to 20, and has a whole word list, and she's reading books.

Seven participants stated that, based on their experiences, the local language arts programs are on par with the language arts programs elsewhere. Subject E's response is representative of the outlook of these seven parents:

Language Arts is comparable. Everything they are asked to do is pretty well comparable to what they had to do home (in Houston, Texas).

Neither of the research participants claimed that the provincial language arts programs as they experienced them were weak overall or below standard when compared with other language arts programs their children experienced outside Newfoundland. Despite the weakness in grammar cited by two parents, the participants have never encountered a school, nationally or internationally, offering a better language arts program than the programs they have experienced locally. This is another indicator that some positive things are happening in Newfoundland education.

Effective language arts programs are deemed to be of the upmost in importance in education generally (Ryan & Cooper, 1995). This may be another significant reflection of the overall quality of local education in some schools because the research participants have high praises for the local language arts curriculum. They also clearly indicate that they place high priority on a good language arts program as they realize it is the foundation for success in all other curriculum areas. Subject K's words above are

representative of the parents perspectives in this area.

Special Education

Question number 5 attempted to obtain this parental subgroup's perspectives regarding the quality of local programs for children with special needs in the schools their children have attended. To obtain the pertinent data the responses to this question were categorized in terms of excellent, very good and good as well as above par, on par and below par when compared with special education services and programs elsewhere. Question number 5 was framed as follows:

After having had a child or children enrolled in schools both locally and elsewhere, how do the local schools you have experienced compare with others in regards to identifying academic or social adjustment problems within your child, (children) and putting subsequent corrective measures in place to overcome these problems?

Four respondents have a child, who for various reasons had availed of, or is presently availing of, special education services in this province. Two participants claimed to be unable to comment on these programs due to lack of experience in this area. While the children of the six remaining participants have not availed of these services, they believe that as a result of their interactions in local schools and with other parents, as well as personal observations, they were able to make informed commentaries on the local special education programs.

The research participants judge the local special education programs in their children's schools highly. One respondent temporarily availed of the services. Based on her experiences, she believes the local special education programs and services are excellent. Subject I's words:

It's . . . extremely good. It's picked up so early here too. (Daughter) was having a problem with the reading and math and she's been (Special services) and it's been excellent. . . . They picked it up there (School I, locally). She was in French Immersion (in Nova Scotia) so of course everything else got bumped, even in the private school there. The services here are extremely good. If they hadn't picked it up here for me in grade four . . . I don't know. So they put her through the program for a whole year and a bit of grade five. Now she doesn't need it. So they put her back into the French (grade five subject, not immersion) again. She's an 85% average student now. I couldn't believe it! I know I made a dreadful mistake . . . choosing French immersion. Thank God it was picked up here in Newfoundland. If they hadn't I don't know where (daughter) would be now. Just floating through the system. Totally turned off because she has the capabilities but she wouldn't have had that foundation. I tell you I was lucky. And she's just doing so well now. So I thank Newfoundland for that.

Two participants judge the local special education programs they have encountered as very good. Below are the words of Subject J, whose son also temporarily availed of this service in an attempt to regain educational skills lost while living an isolated Inuit community in the Canadian North:

She (teacher) called me and told me because she wasn't pleased with his reading skills and she suggested to me to put him in remedial reading. So he went in in January and . . . by June he had regained his reading skills. So I was really pleased. From my experience I think the remedial program is very good, (Subject J).

Seven participants believe local special education programs in the schools they are dealing with are good overall. Subject C's response is typical:

I think the schools here is keeping up with everyone else. I think they handle it fairly well and recognize it early. Also if someone has a . . . (learning) disability they have two people that are working in the school. . . . It's about the same as in Texas.

Several participants stated that the setup of local special education programs is sometimes different from what they experienced elsewhere. However, they also believe that, from their experience, the structure and content of the provincial special education programs appear to be good overall when compared to their experiences nationally and internationally.

One parent, Subject B, has insider information as she was a teacher in this province and in Quebec. She appears to believe that sometimes academic problems may not be readily detected. Furthermore, this parent indicates that she is uncertain as to whether or not there are enough resources available locally to deal with children experiencing academic problems once they are identified. Subject B's voice:

I don't think we necessarily identify them quick enough here and if we do identify them quickly enough, do we have a recourse to help them? I can only speak from my experience in my schools (as a teacher), as opposed to my experience in my children's schools. . . . I know here they'll bend over backwards if your child is slow or learning disabled. I know accommodations are being made, we teach the subject in a special way to the ones that are slower or if there is a learning disability . . . I used to make different tests.

Subject I stated that, based on her experiences, academic difficulties are diagnosed and treated earlier in this province than in Nova Scotia. Eight participants agreed that as a result of their experiences, both in this province and elsewhere, that generally teachers are fairly prompt at identifying academic and social problems. In Subject E's words:

I'd be surprised if there was a problem with it (identifying academic and behavioural problems)... because the teachers seem to be really with it. The teachers seem to know what is going on (here). And the same thing in Texas. I would probably be more inclined to say problems would go undetected in Texas, although there weren't that many kids in the classroom. I'm only guessing, but I would imagine, because there was a lot of bureaucracy, they wouldn't be allowed to just talk to the parents whereas here, you would.

Interestingly, most parents in this research believe that special education services are a valuable component in education even though over half of those interviewed have not availed of this service. Subject L's response:

I know that there are some children with learning disabilities. They actually have three or four teachers who focus on that. They have helpers who sat with them all day long. They have a section in the school which is for learning disabled children which is really wonderful.

This parental subgroup stated that meeting the individual needs of children is an important feature of a good education system. Sconyers (1996) found support for this when compiling a report examining what parents want in education. She concluded that parents strongly support the providing of special education services in public school systems. Waye (1974) also found similar results in this province. Because this parental subgroup believes it is important to offer programs to meet the individual needs of

students, they have another reason to judge the local education system they have experienced fairly well overall. Therefore, it appears as if this research has identified another area of education, at least in some local schools, that is as good as it is in other provinces and countries.

This research set out to obtain the perspectives of a particular subgroup of parents, on the quality of local education, based on their national, international, and local experiences. Another aim of this research is to discover and discuss the components of schooling these parents believe reflect effective education. During discussions regarding the curriculum areas of language arts, music, physical education and special education it was clear that parents of children who attended schools nationally and internationally judge the local system they have encountered as on par, or above par, in these curriculum areas. Also, it is evident that this parental subgroup believes that these areas of a curriculum are important in a quality education system. They believe these curriculum areas ensure individual interests, needs, and strengths are addressed, and the development of a well-rounded individual is promoted. Unfortunately, the education reform reports in this province appear to ignore these positive aspects of local schools and instead emphasize the features that project Newfoundland's education system in a negative light.

Weaknesses of Local Education

Introduction

An education system in which there is no particular need to improve is at risk of *being or becoming mediocre* (Crocker, 1995). While the Canadian public is satisfied with education in general, they sometimes have problems with the specifics (Easton, 1995). Most effective schools, school improvement, and education reform literature states that there are effective schools and ineffective schools, but no school, regardless of how effective, does not have areas in which it cannot improve (Ryan & Cooper, 1995). In light of these statements, I believe it is important to discover and describe the weaknesses of education that emerged as the research participants judged the quality of local education they have experienced. This also provided an avenue for this parental subgroup to give voice to the phenomena they consider to be important indicators of *quality education*. Question number 8 was intended to generate responses that would directly address the weaknesses of the provincial education system. However, data on this concern sometimes came through in the responses to questions number 2, 7, 9, 10, 11 and 12. The data from these responses were analysed to determine if any curriculum areas or educational components were being mentioned in a negative context by two or more respondents.

Question Number 8:

Describe some experiences you have had that have left you feeling that Newfoundland's education system is in need of improvement.

Question Number 2:

Tell me how you rate the academic demands of your child's (children) present and previous schools both in terms of school work and homework expectations.

Question Number 7:

Describe experiences you have had in Newfoundland that make you feel there are some positive things about the local education system.

Question Number 9:

Tell me what you feel are some of the most important things an education system or school can offer a child to help him/her fit into society now, and later as a successful adult.

Question Number 10:

Do you see evidence that local schools you have experienced are fulfilling these expectations you have of schools for your child? Did the school (schools) your child (children) previously attended meet the criteria that you have expressed as important?

Question Number 11:

As a result of your experiences with education, schools and teachers, how do you feel Newfoundland's system rates when compared to your experiences elsewhere? Is it better, worse or the same overall?

Question Number 12:

How would you respond to the statement that the overall education system in Newfoundland is inferior to the education system, or systems, your child or children, have experienced in other provinces and countries?

Mathematics

Question number 2 was included to elicit information on the quality of the local mathematics curriculum. However, if a parent possessed strong positive or negative views regarding this curriculum area, discussions regarding mathematics also surfaced in the responses to questions number 7, 8, 11 and 12. The data referring to mathematics were

organized in terms of extremely demanding, good, and weak, as well as above par, on par, and below par. The questions generating data on the local mathematics programs were framed as follows:

Question Number 2:

Tell me how you rate the academic demands of your child's (children) present and previous schools both in terms of school work and homework expectations.

Question Number 7:

Describe experiences you have had in Newfoundland that make you feel there are some positive things about the local education system.

Question Number 8:

Describe some experiences you have had that have left you feeling that Newfoundland's education system is in need of improvement.

Question Number 11:

As a result of your experiences with education, schools and teachers, how do you feel Newfoundland's system rates when compared to your experiences elsewhere? Is it better, worse or the same overall?

Question Number 12:

How would you respond to the statement that the overall education system in Newfoundland is inferior to the education system, or systems, your child or children, have experienced in other provinces and countries?

Eight of the twelve participants judged the local mathematics programs they have encountered as good overall. In the words of Subject H:

The math program I really like . . . I have no major concerns about it.

Seven out of the eight parents who believe the provincial mathematics programs are good overall, believe that the local mathematics programs are on par with their

experiences elsewhere in terms of expectations and demands. Subject K's response is representative of the participants who stated that the local mathematics programs they have encountered are on par with mathematics programs elsewhere:

The math program is good overall. The science and math are about the same (as in Edmonton).

However, four of the eight parents who claimed that the local mathematics programs are good overall, also indicated that the programs they have encountered could still be more challenging in some areas, less repetitive, and could be taught at a more accelerated pace. Subject C's response is typical:

The math . . . could be a little bit tougher. They are in the third grade and they are just doing the beginning of multiplication. They demand more(in Texas), like real tough problem solving. They would give a lot of extra . . . challenging math. It just seems slow here. We need more problem solving here. It seems . . . repetitive. Are they learning that much from that repetition or could they be getting more out of some type of problem solving? ... Their (Texas) math was a little stronger, maybe.

Three participants claimed the local mathematics programs they have experienced are weak overall, and in need of improvements generally. Subject E's words are representative in this regard:

They have high expectations in general but I find that the math, (for) all three of them (her children), even my oldest child, who went to (private school here) for a while, in general none have been challenged in math. I find the math program less challenging. I can't figure that out because... in the end Canadian Universities and American Universities are comparable so they must make up for it somewhere. (Son) came here in grade three. I found he was way ahead. So they must catch up

in the end, by grade 12, or something. . . . The middle one finds math difficult, but she doesn't find it difficult here. But if we stayed in U. S. she'd probably have a harder time with it. I'm not complaining or anything. The other two are mathematical, and they find it real easy (here).

Subject D again stood out from the rest of the participants. She stated that the provincial mathematics programs at her children's local schools are overemphasized and too academically demanding. In her words of criticism:

Math extremely demanding. There is a lot of emphasis put on math here, more so than back home (Scotland) but it's still popular back home. Some of the things they come home with, even I have to look at them and think (before doing) . . . There is an awful lot of emphasis put on math, (and) pressure on children. . . . There are an awful lot of expectations of homework here. . . . It's mainly math (in junior high) and in elementary it's math as well.

Again, when we compare Subject D's perspectives on the provincial mathematics programs above, with the perspectives of Subjects E and C examined earlier, one can again find an explanation for the difference in their assessments. For example, many theorists believe that people have distinct perceptions of phenomena depending on how they view the world and respond to it (Ballantine, 1997). This is especially true in light of the fact that Subjects C, E, and D have their children in the same schools, Schools I and II.

Subject D was the only research participant to evaluate the local mathematics programs she has encountered as more challenging than the mathematics programs experienced elsewhere. One might conclude that Subject D judged the local mathematics programs she has encountered extremely highly because her previous experiences have

been with weak mathematics programs in England and Scotland. Support of my conclusion can again be found in the symbolic interactions theory that states that people bring to a situation their particular notions of what constitutes good education and respond according to the particular set of expectations they bring to the situation (Roberts, 1991). This statement may be particularly applicable to Subject D's situation as some literature claims that England's and Scotland's performance on international mathematics examinations are below that of Canada. For example, the only European countries that do better than Canada on international studies of student performance in mathematics are Finland, Sweden, Switzerland and Hungary. Also, in the Second International Assessment of Educational Progress, 1990-1991, Mathematics, Age 13, Scotland came out behind Canada in student performance levels (Schweitzer, 1995). Similar results were found in the International Assessment of Educational Progress, Educational Testing Service, 1992 (Ryan & Cooper, 1995). Thus, Subject D may have judged the local mathematics curriculum she has encountered highly because the mathematics standards in England and Scotland, the countries in which she previously resided, may be lower than in this province.

To recap, four out of the eight participants who claimed that their experiences with the local mathematics programs are good overall, also state that these programs could be improved. However, three of these four parents also stated that the standards and demands of the local mathematics curriculum they have experienced are on par with mathematics programs outside this province. If one examines the claims of these three

participants along with the analysis of Subject D, then one can conclude that a quarter of the twelve participants may have encountered mathematics programs outside this province that are also in need of improvements.

I believe additional literature supports the conclusion that some other provinces and countries may also have weak mathematics programs. Two of the research participants had previous educational experiences in the United States. According to a national mathematics assessment conducted in the United States in 1990, one out of three eighth-graders could not solve two-step mathematics problems using addition and subtraction and one step problems using multiplication and division, typically taught at the elementary level (*Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1992*). Levine and Ornstein (1993) claim that research indicates that American students continually have a low performance level overall in mathematics.

Nine of the parents interviewed had educational experiences in other Canadian provinces. Literature indicates that by the end of high school Canadian students' mathematics scores are weak by international standards and in comparison to far-eastern, industrialized countries. Finally, on the Second International Assessment of Educational Progress, 1990-1991, *Mathematics, Age 13*, in which all Canadian provinces participated, Newfoundland came out below the national mean, but Ontario (English), Manitoba (English), New Brunswick (English) and Ontario (French) all performed below Newfoundland (Schweitzer, 1995).

The researcher has concluded that some areas of Newfoundland's mathematics

programs, in the schools the research participants' children have attended, may be in need of improvement. However, the literature above indicates that these particular schools may not be alone in this regard. Sadly, this fact appears to have been often overlooked by local politicians when perpetuating the belief that the outcomes of Newfoundland's education system are below an acceptable standard.

On the positive side, two of the six subjects calling for improvements in the provincial mathematics program, ex-Newfoundlanders having recently returned to the province after having lived elsewhere for an extended period, believe that while growth is still needed in mathematics, they have witnessed improvements over the past few years. In Subject B's and G's words:

Math could improve. . . . It's not advanced enough. Our math could be a lot further ahead than it is. It is getting better, as there is more problem solving . . . I'd like to see even more problem solving in our curriculum, (Subject B).

Again some of the courses (math) were challenging I suppose . . . I think that is a concern but it's starting to be addressed. I think there have been some good improvements over the last number of years. I mean in the math and science and so on, (Subject G).

An interesting phenomenon emerged during discussions of the local mathematics programs. When asked to talk about the quality of the mathematics programs, many of the respondents' answers were short and to the point. The researcher questioned whether or not the research participants were *actually concerned about or confident enough to make*

comments on this curriculum area. Because the participants were very vocal on most topics raised, I assume that the former explanation is acceptable here.

However, I wonder if this lack of commentary on the mathematics programs is a gender issue as ten of the research participants were female and Subject F was a husband and wife team. Furthermore, the only male participant generally provided the least descriptive data overall, but his comments on the mathematics curriculum were lengthier, and more detailed than the responses of most other parents when discussing this curriculum area. There is literature that offers some support to the possible influence of gender on this phenomenon. For example, in 1992, the American Association of University Women report found that girls and boys enter school roughly equal in measured ability, and that girls are even ahead of boys in some school readiness measures. But by the time they reach high school girls have fallen behind their male classmates in key areas such as math (Campbell, 1996). If this is indeed the end result of one's progression through school some female parents may be less inclined to be actively involved in their children's mathematics programs. Therefore, they may believe that they are unable to comment on this curriculum area. However, the most likely explanation for this lack of commentary on mathematics by the female research participants may be that some members of society believe they are less able to judge performances in mathematics and science than other subjects such as language (Crocker, 1995).

Science

Question number 3 was included to elicit information on curriculum areas other than the basics of reading, writing, and mathematics. Consequently, it generated input on the quality of the provincial science programs in the schools the research participants' children have attended. However, if a parent possessed strong positive or negative views regarding this curriculum area, discussions on the science curriculum also surfaced in the responses to questions number 7, 8, and 11. The responses referring to science were organized in terms of good, fair and weak, as well as above par, on par and below par.

Question Number 3:

Tell me about the programs that go beyond the basics of reading, writing and math (ie. music, fine arts, religion, physical education, science, social studies etc.) that your child (children) participates in locally and has participated in elsewhere. How do you feel about schools offering such programs, and how do you rate these programs overall, if you feel they should be offered.

Question Number 7:

Describe experiences you have had in Newfoundland that make you feel there are some positive things about the local education system.

Question Number 8:

Describe some experiences you have had that have left you feeling that Newfoundland's education system is in need of improvement.

Question Number 11:

As a result of your experiences with education, schools and teachers, how do you feel Newfoundland's education system rates when compared to your experiences elsewhere? Is it better, worse or the same overall?

Seven research participants judged the science programs in their children's local

schools as fair to good overall, and on par with experiences in science elsewhere. In

Subject K's words:

It is a good science program. They have a science fair and so forth but . . . not a big deal is being made of it. There doesn't seem to be a science club where you can do experiments. It could be promoted a little bit more. Academically speaking it covers the basics . . . About the same in Edmonton. As far as I can recall there was no science fair for primary and I wouldn't have experience for the elementary. When (son) moved here he wasn't behind in science.

Subject I stated that the provincial science program in her daughter's school is good and slightly above par when compared with her experiences elsewhere. These are her words:

From what I've experienced from the science program that is going on and the science fair - extremely good . . . I'd say that it is definitely on par with Nova Scotia. It's so nice to see it (science fair) so young too, in grade five. It's a bit younger than in Nova Scotia (for the science fair). They didn't start that until junior high school.

Subject E, claimed that the science programs in the local schools her children have attended are good overall. She stated that the science curriculum at the primary and elementary levels is on par with her experiences in Texas but that the local junior high program may be a bit below par. However, she believes this weakness is due to the fact that her children are in a small junior high school locally, in comparison to Texas, and thus the children do not have access to specialist teachers. In Subject E's words:

It seems pretty good I would say the junior high program is probably not as involved as the one in Texas. Well they had more kids. The school was bigger. The junior high kids changed classes for every subject. When they had science . . . that teacher only taught science. I don't know if it's any better (in Texas). It's just that they did more activities. Whereas here it is more book learning. I like more activities but you need a special science teacher for that. (Elementary here) seemed fine. I don't remember thinking anything about it It seems the same as Texas.

As a result of their experiences, three participants, Subjects A, B and F, claimed that the local science programs are weak and below par overall when compared to science programs in schools outside Newfoundland. These parents judged the science programs as weak for the following reasons: the subject matter is not in-depth enough; lack of specialist teachers and instructional resources; the superficial emphasis on the annual science fair; and the absence of teacher in-service and professional development in this curriculum area. In the words of Subjects F and B:

Not as advanced. I think our kids (have) seen most of it before. I think I have to say they (children) are a grade to a half a grade in advance in the subject matter and it is not done in such depth. I don't think it is at quite as a sophisticated level. The text books are more sophisticated (in Montreal) when I look at the science (in Montreal) and here, (Subject F).

We haven't seen a sign of science. I'm appalled at that. They have a brand-new program there and we never see it. I bet the teachers haven't been in-serviced yet. We really need this (science) but the kids don't have it. Yet we are shoving down their throats that they got to do science fairs. How are they gonna get an interest in that stuff if the program is not done in schools. It is too much work for the teacher, it's the parents who end up doing it (science fair). The students haven't a clue what they are doing. The program doesn't suit doing science fairs. . . . There is no point in bringing in programs, if you (referring to teachers) can't do it because you don't have the materials, (Subject B).

As is the case with the provincial mathematics programs, the research participants judged the local science programs they have encountered more negatively than other curriculum areas such as language arts, music, physical education and special education. While this is certainly an indication that improvements are needed in this curriculum area, in some local schools, the literature again indicates that these schools may not be alone in receiving a poor evaluation in science. According to Schweitzer (1995), by the end of high school Canadian students are, on the average, weak in science by international standards. Also, in international tests, American students regularly score near the bottom of the list in science (Cole, 1992).

This revelation that there are many students outside this province who also do not appear to be performing highly in science is not intended to excuse the poor evaluation of the local science programs experienced by this parental subgroup. However, it is to again emphasize the point that the local government, when discussing a curriculum such as science, must present the broader picture. For example, the education reform documents should inform the public of the poor state of science curriculum in schools generally in North America. This approach, rather than implying that this province's poor academic performance is indicative of a poor system of local schooling, would paint a more complete and forthright picture of provincial educational realities.

Fine Arts

The arts are needed in education. Our concept of literacy should include drama, music, movement, and arts and crafts (Jalongo & Stamp, 1997). In the literature review in Chapter II, it was evident that there are numerous social, psychological and educational benefits for including the arts in the curriculum. For example, literature indicates that the arts are as basic to the curriculum as is reading, mathematics, or composition (Jalongo & Stamp, 1997). Some claim that the arts are essential to the education of a well-rounded individual (Bess & Fisher, 1993). This is particularly important as the parental subgroup in this research values an educational system that emphasizes the development of well-rounded individuals.

There are many benefits that result from including the arts in the curriculum (Bess & Fisher, 1993; Fowler, 1990; Jalongo & Stamp, 1997). Literature suggests that an effective education system must offer a broad and well-rounded curriculum (Finn, Ravitch & Francher, 1984; Willie, 1987). In light of these two statements, question number 3 was included to elicit information on the quality of the provincial fine art programs in the schools the research participants have experienced. However, if a parent held strong positive or negative views regarding this area of the curriculum, this topic occasionally came up in questions number 7, 8 and 11. (Fine arts, according to the participants, generally encompass what the literature would term “arts and crafts”). Whenever the respondents referred to fine arts, the data was organized in terms of very good, good and

weak as well as above par, on par, and below par with the participants' experiences with in-school fine arts programs outside Newfoundland.

Question Number 3:

Tell me about the programs that go beyond the basics of reading, writing and math (ie. music, fine arts, religion, physical education, science, social studies etc.) that your child (children) participates in locally and has participated in elsewhere. How do you feel about schools offering such programs, and how do you rate these programs overall, if you feel they should be offered.

Question Number 7:

Describe experiences you have had in Newfoundland that make you feel there are some positive things about the local education system.

Question Number 8:

Describe some experiences you have had that have left you feeling that Newfoundland's education system is in need of improvement.

Question Number 11:

As a result of your experiences with education, schools and teachers, how do you feel Newfoundland's education system rates when compared to your experiences elsewhere? Is it better, worse or the same overall?

Analysing the data revealed that seven of the twelve participants believe the fine arts programs in their children's local schools are in need of improvement overall. Based on their experiences, four of these seven participants stated that the provincial fine arts programs are below par, and three claim this curriculum area is on par, when compared with experiences outside Newfoundland. In Subject J's words:

I know they offer it after school, . . . through MUN Extension. . . . In grade 4 we tried registering (Son) twice for that program. Then it didn't get put off because of lack of interest so I didn't bother in grade 5. There is not a great lot of art. But he

does come home with drawings and stuff like that. He loves art. . . . I'd like to actually see an art class. I'd like to see an art teacher. I'd like to see it as a subject. . . . There was a lot of art in the school (in Scotland). I must say it was visible in the school too. I can remember the corridors being lined with paintings and pictures that the children had done.

Two parents believe the local fine arts programs in the schools they have encountered are good overall and on par with experiences elsewhere. Two participants indicate that based on their experiences, this province's fine arts programs are very good and on par with experiences outside the province. Subject K's response is beneficial:

Oh constantly there is evidence of art (here). Art is taught all the time in the classes. Some teachers give it a little more emphasis than others, based on their particular strengths and weaknesses. Oh, really good, as well in Edmonton. Art is the same (in both places).

One parent stated that, from his family's perspective, the local fine arts programs they have experienced are very good and above par when compared with experiences elsewhere. This parent stated that as a result of his family's experiences he believes there is a greater emphasis on fine arts in Newfoundland than in some other provinces. This participant is the same parent who clearly stated previously that his children had earlier attended a French system that generally emphasized excellence in the core academic subjects and put little emphasis on other curriculum areas. In Subject F's voice:

The art program here at (School III) is very good. I don't know how they manage to teach it. I think there were years when our kids had no art.

Again one can see tenets of the symbolic interactions theory manifested in the words of Subject F above. For example, because his children had little previous exposure to the arts or fine arts programs in the curriculum elsewhere, he arrived with few preconceived notions of the criteria of a good fine arts program. Therefore, he may have been less critical when assessing the fine arts programs in the local schools his children have attended.

Another interesting theme that emerged from the parents' voice regarding the fine arts programs in their children's local schools is that the quality of programs vary from school to school, and even class to class, depending on the interests and talents of given teachers (See the comments of Subject K on the previous page and Subject B below). This premise finds support in literature as Jalongo and Stamp (1997) state that few teachers have confidence about their backgrounds and teacher preparation in the fine arts. Often the common message of teachers is the same "I am not a performing artist; therefore, I cannot contribute to young children's growth in art" (p. x). This inconsistency regarding the quality of programs from school to school was also somewhat evident when the participants spoke about mathematics, science and French, however it was more pronounced and directly stated by the participants when discussing fine arts. In Subject B's words:

We (Newfoundland) used to have qualified teachers here teaching art too . . . I think that it's too bad that we lost it out of the schools. (Daughter's) teacher does a lot of art in the classroom and (Daughter) just loves that. She's thriving in that atmosphere.

Seven participants stated that based on their local experiences they believe that the provincial fine arts program needs upgrading. These participants also believe that their local experiences are no worse than their other experiences with this curriculum area, nationally and internationally. One participant claimed his children's experiences with fine arts programs in local schools are above par when compared to experiences outside this province. This again indicates that while local fine arts education is in need of improvement in some local schools, the provincial situation may not be any worse than it is in some other provinces and countries. In Subject C's words:

You could do a little more. In Texas too, there wasn't a lot of it. It is up to the teacher. I don't find any of the classes really do a lot anywhere.

It appears that while there are differences in the quality and quantity of fine arts programs offered from school to school, and even class to class, overall improvements are needed locally. This is significant as parents earlier indicated that they want and value an education system that is broad and well-rounded, exposing their children to many curriculum areas.

Multiculturalism

Canada is a multicultural society and multiculturalism has been the official policy since 1971. Multiculturalism was enshrined in the 1982 Constitution Act as part of the

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Alladin, 1992). But the Federal Government's policy of multiculturalism does not appear to have a direct impact on education and on Canadian schools. For example, attention to multicultural education varies from province to province (Alladin, 1992). Research by Connors-Stack (1995) found this claim regarding multicultural education to be true in the Newfoundland context.

According to Ryan and Cooper (1995) a multicultural education is an education that values cultural pluralism and seeks to enrich the cultural perspective of all students. It is viewed as the best way to combat prejudice and divisiveness that exist among different cultures. By developing mutual respect and appreciation of different lifestyles, languages, religious beliefs, and family structures, students may help shape a better future for all members of society. However, some educators fear that cultural pluralism in the schools may destroy any sense of common traditions, values, purposes, and obligations and that it may divert schools' attention from the basic purpose of educating for civic, economic, and personal reasons. These conflicting viewpoints are of special interest to critical pedagogy in the education field. Critical theorists contend that educational institutions are concerned with maintaining the traditional sources of power and legitimizing their own interests while ignoring, marginalizing or dismissing the interests of the less powerful and minority groups (Cherryholmes, 1988; Doyle, 1993; Giroux & McLaren, 1984; Popkewitz, 1984). Because of this desire to maintain the social and economic status quo, some members of society may fear the adaptation of a multicultural component to education.

I did not give any consideration to the issue of multiculturalism in education when

constructing the open-ended questions to guide the interview with the research participants. However, data analysis indicated that this is a major concern for some of the research participants. This concern was voiced in the responses to various questions throughout the interview. To understand how I neglected to provide the research participants with an opportunity to address the issue of a multicultural curriculum, one can again turn to the symbolic interaction theory. Using this perspective one can reason that because I live, and have always lived in an environment where the majority of citizens are from the same basic cultural and racial background, I did not consider this an issue of importance in the local school system. This view directly opposes the views of the research participants who have sometimes lived in very cosmopolitan centres, such as Montreal, Edmonton, Morocco, London, and Houston. Because of their lived experiences, this parental subgroup recognizes the need for a multicultural component to education.

When discussing various questions, six of the twelve participants mention the lack of a multicultural component in the local curriculum they encountered as an issue in need of being addressed. Local research by Conners-Stack (1995) provides some support for this claim. Subject K believes the lack of a multicultural emphasis is the main drawback of the local education system as she has experienced it. In her words:

Academically you are ahead (of Edmonton) but you can't meet the idea of multiculturalism because you don't have the population. St. John's is a very closed . . . little city. . . . There is not a lot of integration from multi-cultural . . . people. If people are coming in they are coming in from the same background as us . . . It would be kind of nice to have some segment of . . . the curriculum given over to another culture. Whether it be grade 1 or 2 or a little bit each year. Even current

events. You know, pick a country (to study) . . . this year. China, India or whatever. I just don't want my kids afraid of people because they're different, or have a different religion. But as long as it is brought in (to the curriculum) that there are different people, that is the key, (Subject K).

When asked what is the most important thing a school can do to help prepare a child for life in society now, and later as an adult, Subject B said it is to give a child what can be summarized as a "multicultural education." In Subject B's words:

The role of school should be exposure to all sorts of things. I think it's wrong that children grow up in a really narrow environment. School has the ability to show you everything else that's out there. School has the ability to open the doors that parents can't possibly do because they are in their own little minds and how they live their lives. No, I don't think (schools are doing that here).

Finally Subjects A, B, D, H and K stated that they believe the social studies and the religion programs presently offered in local schools provide a good opportunity to bring a multicultural component into the curriculum. To meet this objective, the research participants suggested that local social studies programs need to shift their present focus from Newfoundland and Canada to other countries and cultures. This suggestion may be *valid as social studies and multiculturalism have a very close link in their concern although they have separate histories and identities* (Yu, 1985). Some of the research participants also claimed that the local religious education courses should place more emphasis on world religions, and expose children to cultural diversity. Local research by Magsino and Singh (1986) provides credence to these suggestions as they found that many courses

presently offered in provincial schools, particularly at the senior high level, could easily accommodate multicultural matters. Subject A's and D's voice concerning the lack of multiculturalism in local curriculum are helpful in this regard:

I don't like teaching of religion . . . they are updating . . . it but it will still be just Christian. I'll still hate it. I want my children to know what's going on in the world. There is a synagogue on Elizabeth Ave. So let's find out about Judaism and the Jewish people in our community. There is a Mosque on Logy Bay Road. Let's find out about that . . . I don't see the benefit of closing your eyes to the other religions. It just leads to misunderstanding, . . . and not understanding these other religions. I'd like to see world religion taught as a . . . historical, universal, sociological course, not a spirituality thing. I feel infringed upon even at (School D) where they are having tests on Christianity. I'm not against that, but it is not well rounded. They don't understand other religions. Like if you are a Moslem and you fight it's not because you are Moslem, but because you are hungry. It's a historical, cultural, social thing, (Subject A).

There is an awful lot of emphasis on Newfoundland in your social studies. It is great and I find it as interesting as (my daughter) did, but I think they should do more . . . world geography. This is where you get well-rounded children, (Subject D).

Many parents who have recently transferred to Newfoundland have lived experiences enabling them to understand the necessity for a multicultural component in curriculum. Such a belief is not specific to this subgroup of parents. Parental surveys, especially in the U.S., indicate that improved curriculum, mainly a multicultural curriculum, is a major educational priority for parents (Baenen, 1995; Harris-Olayinka, 1992). However, a common criticism of multicultural education in Canada is that provinces have not done enough to promote multicultural education. For example, the

only provinces with a comprehensive policy on multicultural education are Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan and Manitoba (Alladin, 1992). In addition, local research by Connors-Stack (1995) and Magsino and Singh (1986) found that the Newfoundland curriculum also needs to place more emphasis on multiculturalism.

Some may argue that a multicultural emphasis is not necessary in this province because Newfoundland has a more homogenous makeup than many other Canadian provinces. However, if one examines this parental subgroup's outlook from the symbolic interactions perspective, it becomes obvious that they support a multicultural emphasis in curriculum because of their commonsense views of reality. In other words, they have come to view the lack of emphasis on cultural diversity as a symbol of misunderstanding, narrow mindedness, and prejudice because they have witnessed, in their lived experiences outside Newfoundland, that lack of knowledge about other peoples and cultures can lead to social problems and injustices.

It seems that as a society, we are not content with the three R's as our only fundamentals. For example, a recent call for the return to the basics has centered on geography as we are becoming more conscious of the interdependence of our world and can see with increasing clarity that we are ill prepared to deal with its complexity (Allen, 1992). It would appear that as we redefine basic skills for the twenty-first century, schools will have to contend with a host of issues that relate, directly or indirectly, to the concept of a multicultural curriculum.

Discipline

Discipline is a prime concern to parents and teachers alike (Ballantine, 1997; Crawford & Freeman, 1996; Sconyers, 1996). Since the Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa Poll of the Public's Attitude Toward Public Schools was initiated in 1969, student discipline has been the most frequently mentioned topic. In fact, it has been the first mentioned issue in sixteen out of the first twenty polls (Hartwig & Ruesch, 1994). Because of parental concern with student discipline generally, and the earlier literature review that indicates that student discipline is a necessary prerequisite for student learning, I believe it was necessary that this parental subgroup provide their perceptions regarding the quality of student discipline in the local schools they have experienced.

As was evident earlier, parents whose children were educated nationally and internationally as well as locally have many positive perceptions regarding Newfoundland's education system. One area that they judge highly is the atmosphere evident in the local schools their children have attended. Even though the local school atmosphere they have experienced is generally very positive, this parental subgroup still has concerns regarding student discipline.

In order to elicit input from this subgroup of parents on the quality of local student discipline, question number 1 contained a section on this topic. The responses regarding this issue were organized in terms of excellent, very good, good, fair and poor as well as above par, on par and below par. Question number 1 stated:

Compare for me the school your child (children) now attends with the school (schools) previously attended by talking about some of the following: discipline, home-school communications, attitudes of children towards one another, extracurricular programs and activities, interest level and involvement on the part of administrators, personality and communication style of teachers, parental involvement.

Two parents claimed that student discipline in the local schools their children have attended is poor overall. One of these two participants stated that it was also poor in the school one of her children attended in Nova Scotia. The other parent claimed that, based on her experience, local student discipline is worse than the student discipline she encountered elsewhere. Subject B's words:

Moroccan schools were very strict. The American private school was a lot like our schools here in that it was quite free, but poor behavior wasn't tolerated there. I find discipline slack here. In other schools (in Montreal and Morocco), that I've had experience with, it really wasn't tolerated that you could sauce back to the teacher. You had immediate recourse to the after school detention. You don't have that here. It is always so secretive here. This privacy business. We could improve upon discipline here if we had more communication among teachers. You can take privacy a bit too far. But when it endangers everyone else it has no place whatsoever. This is not a school created problem. It is a home environment created problem that has been dumped on the schools and the schools have been told to handle it.

One research participant stated that student discipline in the junior high school her child attends locally is not only poor but has more problems than the junior high schools in Scotland. Subject D, however, was the only parent to judge both a local primary and an elementary school as having excellent student discipline, similar to the situation back in Scotland. In Subject D's voice:

In Scotland . . . discipline (was) stricter than here, judging by what is going on in my daughter's class at the moment. There is no control in the grade 6 class (grade 6 is in the junior high school, grades 5 to 8). I've complained a few times and nothing seems to be happening. The elementary school is fine (School 1 - grades K to 4). The discipline is super. But they are younger children. . . . Here if someone gets a detention they are proud. . . . The principal's got no control . . . I don't think there is much discipline in the junior high. I'd say you got more problems in your junior high than back home and I'm judging it from my experience as well as when I was in different schools. There is no problem in primary and elementary here from what I can see.

As a result of his children's experiences, one participant stated that local student discipline is fair but below that in his native province. However, he pointed out that this difference was due to differences between the educational philosophy in the French and English systems generally. His response is helpful:

Mine, (French schools in Montreal) were highly disciplined, all French schools are. Orderly, proper table manners attended to at the lunch room. You don't go anywhere unless you are lined up two by two. So the discipline is everywhere including the school yard, the public transit system, and a very strict dress code. Discipline here is better than we hoped. We thought we were going to find it lax. I think it's a lot rowdier (here). They can run up and down stairs, they can do it in twos and threes etc. . . . Discipline (in the English, French Immersion stream) was equivalently lax too here . . . (We prefer) highly disciplined . . . from the point of view . . . that there are clear expectations and there is no deviation from it. Kids know exactly what is acceptable, (Subject F).

Seven research participants stated that student discipline in the local schools they have encountered is good. Three of these seven participants claimed that the local situation is above par, and four claimed it is on par, with experiences in this regard elsewhere. Subjects H and L provided responses that are typical:

I think that probably (School V) has the most discipline of the three schools we've had. . . . Principal over there is very strict, fairly stringent disciplinary actions, suspensions, if things happen. I think it makes a big difference. I think students like to have that. They like to have rules. If they don't have rules they will do whatever they like and it just creates chaos. . . . In Nova Scotia it was also laxer than here, but it was the most lax in Ontario, (Subject H).

Discipline, I find that they are very strict in both schools (School V, a kindergarten to grade 6 and School VI, a junior high). . . . The teachers really keep them well in hand. In the other school . . . students seemed to be really well disciplined. They had a strict principal who really didn't let them get out of hand at all which is good because unruly children can cause a lot of havoc. As they are getting into older grades you see all the little cliques come in. And you get your problems happening with that. I've seen that in both places (Newfoundland and Nova Scotia) the problems seem to be handled pretty well. For discipline themselves I would say the schools are . . . on par, (Subject L).

Finally, one participant gave the local situation a very good rating overall. This judgement was on par with experiences elsewhere. In Subject C's words:

I find the discipline really good here. In Texas we found it very strong, very strong. I find in both Newfoundland and Texas discipline was very good. I help out at the school here and the teachers care about the children. Nobody is wandering the hallways, nobody is talking back. Also, very caring in Texas. Really caring, just out there for the children.

The three parents who mentioned local student discipline in a negative light appear to be more concerned with the one or two students in each class who are continually disrupting, often to the detriment of others, rather than student discipline problems in a general sense. This parental subgroup is also critical of school personnel and policies that are tolerant of poor behavior on the part of a small minority of students. One mother found this to be an issue both locally and in another province, while the other two

parents did not mention the problem as extending beyond this region. In Subject A's voice:

I find that . . . here and in Nova Scotia discipline was the same. And I don't mean that in a positive way. *I have heard of two incidences at our school (of) an extreme problem child, that the administration refuses to deal with, because it is an ugly topic. Interestingly enough the same thing happened at our school in Nova Scotia. I find they are not willing to deal with the extreme cases. I've found that in both places, (Nova Scotia and here). They can deal with the middle of the road cases but (not) when they get a real extreme case. In Dartmouth there was actually a girl who left our school because there were other girls picking on her. Some people have left (School IV) for the exact same reason. . . . Every child has a right to be in school but not to infringe upon others. . . . Someone has to protect the rest of the students.*

Literature lends support to the voice of Subject A. According to Hartwig and Ruesch (1994) teachers often report that even with training they are still not prepared to deal with the more aggressive, uncontrollable students.

To summarize, three participants stated that, based on their experience, student discipline within the local context is worse than elsewhere. Six respondents claimed that student discipline in the schools their children have attended in this province is similar to student discipline elsewhere. The main area of concern for this parental subgroup is not so much the overall lack of discipline generally, but the absence of consistent policies and procedures for dealing with the extreme cases. Finally, three parents stated that they believe student discipline in the local schools they have experienced is above par when compared with what they witnessed in other schools nationally and internationally. According to this, it is clear that improvements are needed in some local schools in the

area of student discipline. However, when one takes into account the literature and parental voice expressed above, student discipline in the local schools the research participants' children have attended appears to be similar to student discipline elsewhere.

As implied previously, the literature on schooling generally indicates that while some schools are more effective than others, no school is as such that it is not in need of improvement (Ryan & Cooper, 1995). This has certainly come through in the voice of the participants during discussions regarding the local schools they have experienced. They clearly have found, based on experiences locally, nationally, and internationally, that they are generally satisfied with this province's education system. However, they believe there are still areas of education in need of improvement.

The Second Minor Theme: Parental Values in Education Are Individualistic

Introduction

This section focuses on whether or not individual parents hold diverse views regarding many components of curriculum. When exploring this theme the following areas will be examined: conflicting views of curriculum emphasis; the role and place of religion in the curriculum; the role and place of French in the curriculum; and the role and place of extracurricular activities in schools. Data regarding parental values in education emerged as a result of analysing the participants' responses to the twelve open-ended interview questions outlined previously.

The Foundation of Individualistic Educational Values

Different goals correspond to different world-views and, in particular, different perceptions about the role of education (Nicholls, Patashnick & Nolen, 1985; Thorkildsen, 1988). *If this is so, then one can conclude that one's world-view, experiences, and history has an effect on what one values in life generally, and thus, in education.* These statements help one focus on the second minor theme emerging from the data.

After examining and reexamining the participants' responses it became evident that different individuals and families hold different values regarding the goals of education,

and what should be the responsibility of schools. It also became obvious that beliefs regarding what should constitute school curriculum are different from person to person and group to group, and this is an issue people *feel* strongly about. *Our views regarding curriculum are connected to our views of what is true and important about ourselves and our world* (Walker & Soltis, 1986). This was evident in some of the data examined earlier. For example, it was clear in the opposing views of Subjects D and E regarding the provincial mathematics programs in their children's local schools.

Conflicting Views of Curriculum Emphasis

First, the data revealed that parents possess different values concerning which curriculum areas, beyond the basics, should be given the most emphasis. For example, Subject E stressed music and band programs over fine arts programs. However, Subject J claimed that fine arts programs should take precedence over music and band programs. In their words:

I don't see much of an art program as I said earlier. I can't even envision what the art program is, which doesn't say much *for the program*. *But personally I don't care because my kids aren't interested in art*, (Subject E).

I find the music program at (School 11) excellent. . . . The instrumental program is great They have a good band program In my case I'm quite happy for them to stress music over art because that's what I want my kids to do. That's what I like. I'm not artistic and my kids aren't. Both of the schools (here) seem to stress music over art. In Texas there was an equal balance. I prefer them to stress music because my kids don't like art, but it's kinda unfair to the kids who like art As it is now, *here*, it works out great for our family, (Subject E).

He does come home with drawings and stuff like that, and he loves art . . . I'd like to actually see an art class. I'd like to see an art teacher. I'd like to see it as a subject . . . I think art is important. I would like to see it offered as a subject because there are a lot of children who are interested, (Subject J).

(Son) is not involved in music. . . . He's not musical at all, (Subject J).

This difference in outlook regarding what should be emphasized in the curriculum agrees with literature that states that parents have knowledge of their children's interests, aptitudes, motivations, and strengths and weaknesses that is not available to others and thus they should have some say in curriculum (Sarason, 1995). Also, research by Walker and Soltis (1986) concluded that polls continually indicate that the general public can not come close to consensus regarding what should be emphasized in education.

The data also indicated that parents value areas of curriculum that they can relate to and perceive as relevant in their lives. For example, Subject I, whose spouse has a secondary career as a professional artist, places a very high value on fine arts in the curriculum. However, Subject D, who was a competitive athlete and whose children are athletic, believes priority needs to be placed on physical education and sports. These two participants, unlike some other subjects, tended to judge the local system as poor in these curriculum areas and below par with experiences elsewhere. In their own words:

(Fine arts) is not concentrated on much (here). There are after school programs . . . through the Arts and Culture Centre or MUN Extension. (In Nova Scotia) they were offered directly through the school. It was easier for the kids. Is was minimal cost. Supplies, that was it. . . . That's what I find different. I'd like to see more art. Without it, (some kids) would never be exposed to it and you could have a budding Picasso, (Subject I).

Awful! I am speaking as someone having gone through school and truly enjoyed sports. I think there should be more emphasis (here). I've not seen any evidence of field and track here. It's more volleyball, basketball, hockey. There are other sports you can play. At home they do field hockey, soccer, rugby, occasionally cricket in some schools, and there is the field and track and swimming. There is no swimming at (Schools A and B) at all. I'd like to see more sport to get a well-balanced child. I got two daughters that are very gifted in sports. They take after me. I was very gifted in swimming. They are both gifted in gymnastics that's why I have them in the programs (outside school). But there is just no gymnastics at all here in the school. Back home they all do gymnastics. . . . (It) is a shame because kids are suffering, (Subject D).

The comments of the respondents in this section illustrate that one's past history and experiences, present circumstances and general life situations, and patterns of interactions with others, influence how they view phenomena. Consequently, different people possess completely different values regarding educational goals, curriculum content and the responsibilities of schools.

Role and Place of Religion in the Curriculum

Nicholls, Patashnick and Nolen (1985) and Thorkildsen (1988) claim that different world-views influence what one believes to be important in a curriculum. This is evident when one examines this parental subgroup's perceptions regarding the place and role of religion in education. This curriculum area generated more data illustrating the diverse educational values different people possess than did any other topic in the research.

Three parents stated that they believe there is no place for religion in the curriculum. Interestingly, some of the issues these parents mentioned when discussing

religion seemed to echo some of the participants earlier views regarding the need for a more multicultural emphasis in the local curriculum. For example, these three research participants stated that if religion is a component of the local school curriculum, it should have a historical, social, and a multicultural emphasis that would expose children to cultural diversity. This claim finds support in the works of Risinger (1993) as he put forth the view that social studies curriculum, especially history and civics, and religion curriculum should be interconnected. Subject K's voice is helpful:

There is no place for religion in schools at all. If they want to teach religion they should bring history into it. Our religion course should be offered as world religions. This is facts on religion, open knowledge for all the world to know. No religious observances. . . . It's not taking into account that we are a multi-background.

Seven respondents considered the availability of religious education a "plus" of Newfoundland's education system. Subject L's words are typical in this regard:

In New Brunswick it is not taught in the schools at all . . . whereas here it is very much in the schools . . . I don't think it hurts them to have it . . . I guess you could almost call that (religion in schools) a benefit in comparison to their system (in New Brunswick). Not one of the main pluses, but it certainly is a plus.

Out of the seven parents who consider the availability of religion in the school curriculum a plus of Newfoundland's education system, three parents favoured the maintenance of some denominational schools, thus providing parents a degree of choice in schooling. These numbers are similar to the findings of local research concerning the issue

of denominational schools (Hardiman, 1993; Warren, 1983). Subject J's voice is typical of the three parents who favoured having the option of choosing a denominational school system for their children:

I think we should still have the denominational school system . . . I do believe that religion is part of the whole person, of education. I think it is important and it should never have been taken out. Specifically Catholic education for him . . . I think if it couldn't be part of the curriculum it should be offered after school. It's important to me.

The words of Subject J above are interesting in light of recent education reform because research since the 1990s has found that school choice may be the best means to achieve effective schools (Dominic, 1992; Goldring & Shapira, 1993; Ryan & Cooper, 1995).

Two respondents claimed they have no preference as to whether or not religion is part of the school curriculum.

Place and Role of French in the Curriculum

The provincial French programs are another curriculum area that the research participants appear to place different degrees of importance on. Consequently, participants often possess very opposing opinions concerning many aspects of French in the curriculum. Two participants stated that the local French programs in their children's schools are excellent and above par. Based on their experiences, five parents claimed that

the provincial French programs are good overall. Out of these five, two stated that the French programs in this province are above par, one claimed the French programs are on par and two participants stated that the local situation is below par in this area. Three respondents judged the French programs they have encountered as poor and below par. Two participants were unable to judge the provincial French programs or make comparisons as Newfoundland is the first place they have experienced French as a component of the curriculum.

The three parents who judged the provincial French programs negatively had previously lived in provinces with large Francophone populations. Out of these three parents, two had lived in Montreal and one had resided in New Brunswick. These research participants appeared to place a high value on French in the curriculum, and tended to judge local programs as in need of improvement and below par when compared to French programs they had previously experienced. The comments of Subject L, who previously resided in New Brunswick, a province with a large Francophone population, illustrate these points. In Subject L's words:

The program in New Brunswick was better. I think that overall the late immersion program could use some upgrading (here). . . . French is not very important here and the unfortunate thing with that is that today when they leave the Island (Newfoundland) they are gonna need it in a lot of other places. And it's unfortunate because these kids are gonna need it. I said to my daughter, . . . at some point in time you are going to have to learn French. Because of knowing how important it is everywhere else I really feel the program should be upgraded here. . . . Even in the English program, the French (as a subject) is better in New Brunswick. We came in January (1997). When we looked at their workbook, they had the identical workbook. But where he was almost finished the book in the same time period, they were only on chapter two. . . . The French is more

concentrated there because it is a Francophone province. But it hinders you here because the kids aren't into it at all. It is not important to the teachers or parents here. So anyway in the elementary school here they could really beef up the program and be more encouraging to the students because like I say it is not important here but it is important everywhere else.

Parents who lived in the United States, Western Canada, Scotland and England do not appear to value French nearly as much as those who lived in Francophone areas, and thus tended to judge the local French programs positively. The words of Subject D below illustrate these points:

Your French is far superior than back home (Scotland). (Daughter) hardly did any French back home . . . up to the equivalent of your grade 6. . . . It is only in the Academy, at junior high that they actually start French. So the French program here is excellent. . . . In Scotland they touched it very weakly. They had a mother who was fluent in French coming once a week. It wasn't part of the curriculum . . . I think it is great.

Subject C and Subject I claimed that their exposure to core French programs was too limited to comment on this curriculum area. Subject C, as could be expected, had never encountered French as a component of curriculum in Texas. Subject I's daughter had been in a French Immersion program in Nova Scotia and had transferred over to an English program in Newfoundland. She is now taking French as a core subject. Because this is her daughter's first experience with French as a core subject she believes she is unable to either judge Newfoundland's core French curriculum, or compare the core French programs in Newfoundland and Nova Scotia.

Place and Role of Extracurricular Activities in Schools

Another area in which people's different educational values unfold is when one views the research participants' different perceptions on the place of extracurricular or after school activities in education. All twelve research participants were satisfied with the overall quality and quantity of after school or extracurricular activities available in their children's local schools. However, for various reasons their children have chosen not to participate in them. Subject J's words are helpful:

There is a lot offered. Inter murals at lunch time, . . . art, and chess after school. But he likes to come home after school instead of staying around to participate in the after school activities. . . . It was never really anything that he was interested in, so we never really pursue anything after school.

Even though this parental subgroup likes both the quality and quantity of extracurricular activities offered in the local schools they have encountered, only two participants believe that schools should routinely offer extracurricular or after school activities. Subject K's view:

Yes, (schools should offer extra curricular activities) because there are a lot of kids out there who can't afford to play extra sports at any level, so this would provide an outlet for children to have somewhere to go after school, and it is physical activity generally speaking, and it does not cost a lot. It is accessible to everybody not just the elite. I think it should be, it's there, it's a public (building).

Three respondents claimed that if children want extracurricular activities such as fine arts lessons or sports, they should take lessons or join a sports league outside the

school. One research participant stated that extracurricular activities should not be the school's responsibility. In Subject E's, F's and A's words:

If mine had an interest in, (say) art, I'd go downtown and find lessons for them, (Subject E).

(Referring to after school activities) . . . I think . . . they can get it outside of school in their own time, (Subject F).

You know extracurricular is not the school's responsibility, (Subject A).

The outlook of these three participants does not correspond to the literature that states that offering after school and extracurricular activities is a characteristic of effective schools (Ryan & Cooper, 1995). It also contradicts external and local research that indicates that parents generally place high value on the availability of extracurricular programs (Tuck, 1995; Sconyers, 1996; Wayne, 1974). Using the symbolic interactionist perspective I believe that an explanation can be found for these opposing views regarding the importance of extracurricular activities in schools. All the parents in this research were well-educated professionals, living in upper middle to upper income neighbourhoods with the household heads employed in well-paying jobs. They can therefore afford the option of providing their children private enrichment and sporting opportunities.

Two research participants did not avail of after school activities themselves but they still maintained that they are an essential part of quality schooling. It is noteworthy that these two parents had both previously worked with native Canadians and had thus been exposed to the social and economic problems some people experience as a result of

being in a lower socioeconomic group. Consequently, these research participants understand the need for such a service in schools. The research participants were generally from the upper middle to upper socioeconomic level, and thus are more economically privileged than many others in society. This may explain why the parental subgroup in this research places less value on extracurricular activities in a school curriculum than the general population.

This section of the research gives support to the claim by Walker and Soltis (1986) that the public values many diverse educational aims and do not agree on priorities in education. It also lends support to their claim that the lack of consensus on the aims of education and curriculum content finds support in educational polls.

Conclusions of the Chapter

In conclusion, this research has found that parents whose children have attended schools nationally and internationally as well as locally, judge the overall quality of local education positively in the schools their children have attended. They like the provincial education system as it possesses many of the attributes that they believe reflect quality education. The components of education this parental subgroup value are different than those valued by others, particularly the authors of the education reform documents. Generally this parental subgroup agrees on many of the attributes they personally believe are important in a good education system. Yet, as was evident in this section, when it

comes to the specifics of curriculum emphasis, the goals of education and the responsibilities of schools, preferences and priorities can be very individualistic.

In the next chapter the conclusions of this research are summarized. Then I will discuss the implications of the research findings. Finally, some suggestions for further research will also be presented.

CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter will briefly review the purpose of this research and then a summarization of the research findings will be presented. This will be followed by a section which deals with the local implications of the research findings. The chapter will conclude by making suggestions for further local research.

Research Purpose: A Brief Recap

This study was conducted to obtain the perceptions of parents whose children have attended schools nationally and internationally on the overall quality of Newfoundland's education system. Furthermore, it was hoped that the research would also shed light on just what this parental subgroup regards as components of effective education or quality schooling. Another aim of this research was to discover and describe the similarities and differences in perceptions on the overall quality of local education held by this parental subgroup and the authors of the provincial education reform documents. Finally, if I found these two groups possessed different perceptions regarding local education I would attempt to explain the origins of these diverse opinions.

Research Findings

The main perception of parents whose children have attended schools nationally and internationally as well as locally is that Newfoundland's system is generally as good as, or better than, public school systems elsewhere. Two out of the twelve research participants report that the only systems they experienced that are sometimes better overall are private systems. To use the direct words of one research participant, private schools are sometimes better only because "the demands of the parents were met through their pockets." One research participant had experiences with two local schools. However, she judged education in these two schools as on par with her experiences in reputable private schools in England. For example, she stated directly that two local schools, Schools I and II, are on par in terms of academic demands with the private school one of her children attended in England. Furthermore, she claimed that by English standards, this private school is regarded as "top notch" as it continually graduates more children into the intermediate level grammar schools than all other schools in the district. Interestingly, two parents reported that their local educational experiences were better overall, when all factors are taken into consideration, than their past experiences in private schools elsewhere.

As was evident in Chapter III, all of the research participants were highly educated professionals. This positive assessment of the local education system in the schools this parental subgroup's children have attended is especially important in light of

some literature on the relationship between socioeconomic status and perceptions regarding the quality of education. For example, there is research that suggests that working class parents sometimes perceive schools in a more favourable light, and the upper-level employee parents are sometimes more inclined to endorse criticisms of schools (Raty, 1996; Burns, 1983). To reiterate, these research participants, who judged their experiences with local education positively are college educated, upper middle to upper socioeconomic professionals. Therefore, if Raty's (1996) and Burns' (1983) conclusions about socioeconomic status and attitude toward education are true, one may have further evidence of the validity of this parental subgroup's claim that the quality of education is good in the local schools their children have attended.

The picture that emerges from parents whose children have attended schools nationally and internationally as well as locally is in contrast to the bleak picture painted in the education reform documents in this province. The data reveal that this negative portrait took its cue from economic reform documents on the necessity of linking education to economic principles and renewal (Arruda, 1997; Canning, 1993; McCann, 1994, 1995).

Schools are social constructs. They are "made" institutions. They reflect the values, biases and priorities of society. Consequently different societies with different values and different ambitions promote very different educational philosophies (Ballantine, 1997; Durkheim, 1961, 1977; Ryan & Cooper, 1995). This is clear in this province, as the education reform documents illustrate that the province's educational aims became

redefined in terms of economic growth and development. Consequently a new set of values and beliefs about the function of education emerged in response to increasing provincial economic woes. Local education is now viewed as promoting the human capital theory, and as the means of producing a highly skilled and adaptable workforce that will lead to greater economic productivity and competitiveness (Arruda, 1997). However, as is evident in Chapters II and IV, there are many who oppose this linear link between educational attainment and economic productivity (Barlow & Robinson, 1994; Hough, 1987; Kazemak, 1988; McCann, 1994; Murnane, 1988; Weiner, 1990; Wotherspoon, 1998).

It is suggested that instead of stating that a poor economy is the product of an underachieving education system, governments and business sectors should accept responsibility for its own economic problems, and look for ways to stimulate economic growth and productivity (Weiner, 1990; Hough, 1987). This alternate approach might ultimately have a positive impact on educational performance in this province. The literature clearly reveals that the responsibility for declining economic production and structural unemployment are more likely the result of the misguided economic policies and priorities of government than an ineffective and inefficient educational system (Hough 1987; Kazemak, 1988; Murnane, 1988; Weiner, 1990). Educators from John Dewey to those writing in the postmodern era present a viewpoint absent from public discourse on *local education*. That is, that *improvements in educational attainment* follow improved political and economic conditions rather than the reverse relationship that is continually

presented in the education reform documents in this province.

The provincial government's negative evaluations of education may be the result of its own political, economic, ideological and pragmatic beliefs. This parental subgroup, having only recently arrived in this province are not yet under these local commonsense notions linking the poor economy with so-called ineffectual educational outcomes, that have seeped down from the business and political elite and infiltrated the minds of the general populace. Thus, they are able to provide a more objective, and therefore positive, analysis of the local education system. Furthermore, they are able to issue a positive portrayal of Newfoundland's education system because they use criteria that they as parents believe are important. Unlike many provincial education reform documents, this parental subgroup does not use the results of standardized test scores as the primary means of judging the quality of education in the schools they have experienced in this province.

While the research participants state that there is a need for improvement in some areas of the math and science curriculums, this parental subgroup believes that the local academic demands in the core subjects, in the schools they have experienced, are fairly high overall. They grade the language arts curriculum, which includes reading, writing, speaking, listening and spelling as very good overall. This may be an important reflection of the overall quality of local education as it is impossible to experience success in other subject areas without a strong foundation in the broad curriculum area of language arts. In addition, a good language arts program also encompasses many of the "basics" which both

literature and parents view as vital in education, regardless of the other goals and curriculum areas that an education system may wish to promote (Ryan & Cooper, 1995).

Like parents and the general population both in this province and elsewhere, parents whose children have attended schools nationally and internationally do not support the education reform documents' premise that the basics of reading, writing, math and science are the only important curriculum areas that should be promoted in education. The participants in this research appear to be saying that while academics and preparation for the workforce are two of the main goals of education, they are not, as some individuals in the local political and business community would lead us to believe, the only important goals of quality schooling. It is evident in the data that this parental subgroup also favours a broad and well-rounded education for their children. Consequently, they value the curriculum areas labelled secondary core in the provincial education reform documents - music, fine arts, the humanities, and physical education - as necessary components in the school curriculum.

The research participants value a broad and well-rounded curriculum. Thus, this parental subgroup judges the local education system positively because they perceive that the local system is currently broad and well-rounded, and presently offering some of the curriculum areas they value. For example, the participants speak very favourably of the local music and physical education programs they have experienced. They also claim that the provincially prescribed physical education and music programs in their children's schools are generally of a higher standard than programs in these curriculum areas outside

this province. In fact, most research participants claim that the provincial music programs in their children's local schools are the best they have ever encountered anywhere, in both public and private school systems. The research participants also have praise for the special education programs offered in this province. They claim that the local special services programs currently offered in the schools their children have attended are as good as similar programs offered elsewhere.

For this group of parents, quality education reflects more than what is offered in the curriculum. Effective education also encompasses the following social and cultural phenomena: opportunities for parental involvement; a positive school atmosphere; accessible, involved, and visible school administrators; friendly, enthusiastic, straightforward, and approachable teaching staff; and good home and school communications. Because the research participants perceive that the local schools they have experienced possess these more intangible components of quality education, they believe the local education system is doing well overall. Emphasis on these social and cultural characteristics of effective education, by this parental subgroup, accounts for the difference in opinion that presently exists between the parents in this research and the authors of the provincial education reform documents, regarding the overall quality of the provincial education system. As stated earlier, the education reform documents appear to be basing their analysis of local education largely on the results of standardized test scores, a questionable practice criticized by many. Martz (1992) states that when schools and education systems rely on test scores, they lose the focus on children and their needs. This

premise seems to support the parents' perspectives and negatively reflects on the stand taken in the provincial education reform documents.

Despite a positive judgement overall, like all school systems, this parental subgroup, as outlined in the data, believes that the local system also has areas in need of improvement. The main curriculum areas are science and math, the very subjects portrayed in the literature as in need of a complete overhaul in the rest of Canada, the United States and Western Europe. This parental subgroup also believes that improvements are needed in some areas of the fine arts curriculum. While they are divided on the place and role of religion in curriculum and are fairly satisfied with the social studies programs, they believe both these curriculum areas could improve by having a more multicultural focus. Finally, the research participants also claim that local student discipline can improve. They specifically outline the need for better policies and procedures for dealing with the so-called behaviourally disruptive children.

This parental subgroup's criticisms of the local education system do not appear to be a reflection of inadequate teaching personnel, ineffectual teaching methods, apathetic administrators, lack of parental involvement, negative school atmosphere, or the lack of information and interaction between the home and schools. The problems exhibited locally, such as weak mathematics, fine arts and science programs, and the absence of a multicultural perspective in the curriculum, are generally similar to educational problems existing nationally and internationally. Furthermore, these problems can only be rectified through the following: a change in curriculum, which presently is under the provincial

government's jurisdiction; the allotment of government funds to allow for the hiring of specialist teachers; the provision of teacher professional development and in-service; the formation of policies and programs for behaviourally and socially challenged children; and a general change in some of the provincial governments' current educational practices and policies.

This research also discovered that what an individual believes to be the important components of a curriculum, the goals of education, and the responsibility of schools is highly individualistic. A person's educational values appear to be a product of his or her present environment, history, and interactions with others. As is evident in the literature review and throughout the research, this premise finds support in the symbolic interactionism theory which states that the meaning that given phenomena have for human beings is central in their own right (Blumer, 1969).

Implications of the Research Findings

Unlike corporations, whose effectiveness can be judged by bottom-line outcomes, the effectiveness of schools is all but impossible to measure (Ryan & Cooper, 1995). This statement flies in the face of the provincial government's apparent practice of judging the quality of local education primarily on the results of standardized test scores, in particular Canadian Test of Basic Skills scores. Relying solely on standardized test scores to evaluate educational outcomes also runs contrary to current effective schools literature

that recommends that the voice of parents be heard in education. This means that when evaluating an education system, and deciding on the educational goals and curriculum, parents must be heard.

In order to provide parents a voice in their children's education they must be given the opportunity to provide input into pedagogy and curriculum (Baker, & Stevenson, 1990; Ballantine, 1993; Charles, 1989). If the provincial government ignores the literature, and the parental voice in this research, and proceeds with the proposed changes in curriculum emphasis outlined in the provincial education reform documents, in a one-dimensional attempt to "fix" the local education system, the end result may be increased parental dissatisfaction. This, in turn, will only negatively impact other areas deemed essential elements of effective education, such as parental involvement, which in turn is linked to student achievement (Sieley, 1984). Ironically, most people in this province were satisfied with local education at the start of the call for reform (Arruda, 1997; Grasser, 1988; Martin, 1991).

It is stated that postmodernism honours human diversity, and the variations and ambiguity in the way different people view situations and learning. It also recognizes the political setting in which education occurs. People choose to promote specific educational philosophies, methodologies and curriculum. The choices they make cannot be made without reference to the values and interests entangled in power structures in the community (Cherryholmes, 1988). Postmodernism is not a rejection of regularity, but a demand that irregularity be accepted as well (Ballantine, 1997). In education this means

that a curriculum should be broad, and interdisciplinary, and that individual children can reach a common goal by different paths. The locus of control in this model is at the individual school level, and children's achievements are measured in whatever works best for children in that school, whether it is tests, portfolios, performances, or projects (Bernstein, 1993; Sizer, 1992; Ballantine, 1997).

Many of these tenets of the postmodern perspective summarize, both directly and indirectly, some of the recurring themes emerging from the research data. *That is, this parental subgroup values a well-rounded and broad education as well as one that covers the basics and stresses academic achievement.* However, despite the literature and the views of the research participants, the provincial education reform documents appear to indicate that in future, curriculum emphasis will focus on the primary core subjects, with lesser priority on the arts and humanities, curriculum areas highly valued by the parental subgroup in this research.

Psychologist Howard Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligence illustrates that high degrees of intelligence can take many forms - scientific, political, social, and artistic - and that all are important. Gardner isolated and identified seven basic, autonomous intelligences: linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, spatial, kinesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal. Eisner (1994) claims that Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences provides justification for the broad and well-rounded curriculum this parental subgroup favours. Gardner (1983) and Fowler (1990) state that schools need to really help students discover areas where they have strengths. According to Eisner (1994) the school

curriculum is a means for changing minds and improving the way people think. Therefore we need to exploit the power of curriculum to optimize whatever potential intelligences individuals possess. As long as schools operate on an essentially *linguistic modality* which utilize a kind of literal, mathematical form of intelligence, it not only delimits what children can know, but also is an impediment to those students whose intelligences are in modalities other than the ones that are emphasized (Fowler, 1990).

If there is credence to this theory of multiple intelligence, then the changes in curriculum emphasis outlined in the provincial education reform documents can only negatively impact upon the educational achievement of students in this province. The following example illustrates this point. A boy, aged fourteen, was a *slow developer*, particularly with respect to language. He was disruptive in the classroom, both his parents and teachers thought him dull, and neither envisioned much of a future for him. When he was fourteen, his parents happened to find a different kind of school pursuing a more holistic approach to education and a less linguistical one. The boy blossomed and his world changed. His name was Albert Einstein.

There are other arguments for maintaining the current broad curriculum so strongly favoured by the research participants. *Researchers have found that students do not achieve highly if the curriculum is meaningless to them* (Fullan, 1981; Schlechty, 1997). Dewey, writing in the early 1900s, stated that natural interest was the best motive for work in schools (Ryan & Cooper, 1995). It is also argued that how students feel in school from day to day is likely to affect their future goals. We expect that students who

are challenged or motivated will be more willing to invest in future schooling. In contrast, students who have daily experiences of feeling bored, disinterested, and unable to make connections between what they are doing and their futures are less likely to feel committed to stay in school (Schlechty, 1997; Schneider, Csikszentmihalyi & Knauth, 1995;Sizer, 1984). Finally, research has illustrated that educational focus on the basics can be counterproductive for the so called “at risk” youth (Means, Chelemer & Knapp, 1991; Murphy, 1992).

If Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligence, and the literature on the benefits of a broad and well-rounded curriculum are correct, then the provincial government will be engaging in a dubious morality if it continues with its current plan to emphasize a curriculum that puts little focus on curriculum areas such as music or art, that not only do the research participants favour, but that a given percentage of the population has an interest in, and an aptitude for. As Irving Layton (1985) wrote in his recent memoir: People provide the meaning of inauthenticity when they do nothing to which they bring their whole selves.

Since the 1990s, effective schools literature suggests that an element of parental choice is needed if society is to get effective schools. Choice advocates maintain that parents be allowed to choose their child’s school according to religious, philosophical or pedagogical preferences. The underlying assumption of choice is that it allows parents to choose the kind of school they want, thus increasing the level of satisfaction with the child’s education (Raywid, 1981). Literature suggests that families are the best decision-

makers regarding their child's educational choices because they have intimate knowledge and an extensive understanding of the child, and his or her needs (Coons & Sugarman, 1978; Goldring & Shapira, 1993).

In addition to the arguments for choice in education, the data in the section regarding the place and role of religion in the curriculum reveal that individual families within the parental subgroup in this research have very diverse views regarding religion in curriculum and the importance of maintaining some parochial schools as a means of providing parents' choice in education. This leaves one to ponder the long-term impact of the government's recent decision to improve educational achievement by totally abolishing the denominational system as a means of eliminating inefficiencies.

Totally eliminating the rights of religious denominations provincially, as a means of improving the so-called inefficient and ineffectual education system may have long-term negative repercussions on some facets of local education. For example, while choice between schools was limited in the past, as a result of educational reform promoting neighbourhood schools choice will be virtually non-existent in future. As has been evident in recent articles and letters in The Telegram, parents under the jurisdiction of the Avalon East School Board are upset because educational reform has left them with almost no choice regarding where to send their children to school. This could have a negative impact on provincial education as research has suggested that when configurations of education, such as schools, families and churches share a commitment to common values and beliefs, and parents exercise choice regarding where they send their children to school, education

is successful (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Coleman, 1987; Goldring & Shapira, 1993).

The purpose of this research was not to criticize the present drive for education reform, or the elimination of the traditional denominational system as a large scale reform was needed. Rather, it is to place it in a context which treats the current prescriptions and recommendations as themselves problematic and as being at risk precisely because the level of analysis from which they began was inadequate. Thus, it seems that Thomas Jefferson may have been right - it is better for someone to know nothing about a subject than to rely on falsehoods when making critical decisions about our future (Mahaffey, 1993).

Suggestions for Further Research

A central research question emerging from this study is whether or not this perceptions mismatch between the parental subgroup in this research and education reform documents, regarding the overall quality of the provincial education system, is exclusive to the six schools in this study, or would it also manifest itself in other schools within the capital city or in another provincial town. A good place to conduct a similar study might be in the Gander area as this town has a high transient population by Newfoundland standards. Also, when I was initially considering this topic as a potential area of research, I became motivated to pursue it when a letter appeared in a local newspaper by a retired teacher from Gander. Based on her experiences and interactions with parents whose

children have attended schools nationally and internationally as well as locally, this former educator had informally arrived at some of the same conclusions as this research. That is, that the overall quality of the provincial education system is on par with, or better than, many public systems parents have encountered elsewhere. Thus, another study similar to this one might complement the findings of this research. It would also further stress the need for the provincial government to find additional measures, other than relying on standardized test score results, to evaluate the local education system.

The main focus of this research was on the primary, elementary and junior high levels. Future research might also attempt to discover if parents whose children have attended schools nationally and internationally hold the same positive perceptions of local secondary level education as they hold for local schooling from kindergarten to grade nine. This would be intriguing as Schweitzer (1995) claims that in Canada educational results are weaker at the secondary level than at the primary and elementary levels.

Another research topic one might explore within a couple of years is whether or not local parents feel as positively about the new neighborhood schools as they felt about schools when they could choose a school based on factors such as religious affiliation or traditional family ties.

Finally, forthcoming research might examine potential avenues whereby local parents could be given real voice in education so that their wishes can be met when determining the goals of education and curriculum content. After all, as is evident in this research, the data forthcoming from this parental subgroup regarding the quality of local

education differs from the data in the provincial government's education reform documents. Furthermore, literature states that the wishes of parents have to be met if society is to attain quality schools and effective education.

In the final analysis, the voice of parents must be heard and seriously incorporated in the educational change process at all levels. Failure to hear the voice of parents will lead to a decreased sense of ownership of schools, and consequently decreased parental interest and involvement. If literature is correct, this will negatively impact upon all aspects of student achievement. Ironically, increased student achievement is supposedly the ultimate justification for, and main goal of, the provincial government's current education reform efforts.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Letter Approving the Research Proposal



Memorial

University of Newfoundland

Faculty of Education

February 13, 1998

Dear Elaine,

After reviewing your resubmission, I am satisfied that you have addressed the points raised by the Ethics Review Committee. We wish you all the best in your research.

Sincerely,

T. Seifert
Ethics Review Committee

cc: Dr. Singh, Dr. Doyle

SUPPORT



Appendix B

**Letter Outlining the Proposed Research and Requesting the Principals to
Distribute Letters of Research Purpose and Participation/Consent to
Children Whose Parents Had Recently Transferred to Newfoundland**

5 Milbanke St.

St. John's, Nfld. A1B

To Whom It May Concern;

I am a graduate student currently enrolled in a Masters of Education Program at Memorial University. My research proposal, which has already been approved by the Ethics Review Committee of the Faculty of Education, will focus on obtaining the perspectives of parents having recently transferred to this province regarding the 'quality' of our educational system based on their experiences here, and elsewhere. This study will be useful in determining one parental sub-group's perspectives regarding the overall 'quality' of our education system here in Newfoundland, as well as identifying the components of education regarded as valuable, from this parental group's perspective.

Thus, your assistance is needed to help identify potential participants from whom approximately ten to twelve parents can be randomly selected. Criteria for inclusion will include all of the following criteria: (1) Parents having transferred to this province from *another province or country and have a child or children presently enrolled in grades two to level three*, (2) Parents who have had a child or children having completed at least one full year of schooling locally and, (3) Parents who have also had at least one child having completed at least 2 years of schooling elsewhere.

After identifying potential participants meeting the above criteria, please distribute

the enclosed stamped self-addressed envelopes and letters of consent to the children of these CFA parents. These letters of consent will include the following: statement of the general purpose of the study, identification of the researcher and University of affiliation, a statement of confidentiality, a statement regarding the availability of test results, an explicit statement conveying the voluntary nature of participation, the right to withdraw at any time, and an outline of the research procedures involved.

I understand that the results of this research will be available to me upon request and that Elaine Harris is the person to contact if I have any questions about the study. Elaine Harris can be contacted at either 739-9298, the above mailing address or the following e-mail address: harris@public.compusult.nf.ca . Furthermore, if I want to contact persons not directly involved with this project, I can contact the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies, Linda Phillips, at 737-3402. In addition, if I require additional information, or clarification on any aspects of this research I can contact Elaine Harris' supervising Professors in the Faculty of Education: Amarjit Singh at 737-8008; Clar Doyle at 737-7556.

Sincerely,

Appendix C

**Sample of Letter Explaining Diverse Aspects of the Research and Requesting
Interviewee Consent Which Administrators Will Distribute to the Children
Whose Parents Had Recently Transferred to Newfoundland**

I am Elaine Harris, a graduate student currently enrolled in a Masters of Education Program at Memorial University. My research, which will focus on obtaining the perspectives of parents having recently transferred to this province regarding the 'quality' of our educational system based on their experiences here, and elsewhere, has been approved by the Ethics Review Committee of the Faculty of Education. This study will be useful in determining one parental sub-group's perspectives regarding the overall 'quality' of our education system here in Newfoundland, as well as identifying the components of education regarded as valuable, from this parental sub-group's perspective.

In signing this document, I am expressing my understanding that I will be part of the research study described above and I am giving my consent to be interviewed by Elaine Harris. I understand that this interview will be audio taped and subsequently transcribed to text. After this research is completed, the audio tape will be destroyed and no person, other than the researcher, will have access to it. I understand that I will be interviewed at a site and time convenient to me. The interview will take about one hour to complete. I also understand that the researcher may have to contact me for a follow-up interview in the hopes of obtaining additional information, at some future date.

This interview will be granted freely. I have been informed that the interview is entirely voluntary and that I can terminate the interview at any point. I have also been informed that my answers to questions will be kept confidential and no reports of this study will ever identify me in any way.

I understand that the results of this research will be available to me upon

request and that Elaine Harris is the person to contact if I have any questions about the study or about my rights as a study participant. Elaine Harris can be contacted at 739-9298. Furthermore, for additional information, or clarification regarding any aspect of this study, I can contact Elaine Harris' supervising Professors at Memorial University's Faculty of Education : Amarjit Singh at 737-8008; Clar Doyle at 737-7556, or the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies, Linda Phillips at 737-3402.

Date: _____

Participant's Signature

Contact Phone Numbers:

(Day) _____ (Evening) _____

Interviewer's Signature

Appendix D

Interview Questions

One-on-One Guiding Interview Questions

In order to obtain a well-rounded view of the education system in Newfoundland, I would like to obtain input from a valuable source as yet not considered. That is, parents whose children attended schools in another province or country as well as in Newfoundland. Your views are important because you had experiences elsewhere and are thus in a good position to compare Newfoundland's education system to ones you earlier encountered. I need your input to provide a more accurate and complete picture of this province's education system.

1. Compare for me the school (schools) your child (children) now attends with the school (schools) previously attended by talking about some of the following: discipline, home-school communications, attitudes of children towards one another, extra curricular programs and activities, interest level and involvement on the part of administrators, personality and communication style of teachers, etc.
2. Tell me how you rate the academic demands of your child's present and previous schools both in terms of school work and homework expectations.
3. Tell me about the programs that go beyond the basics of reading, writing and math (ie. music, fine arts, religion, physical education, science, social studies etc.)

that your child (children) participates in locally and participated in elsewhere. How do you feel about schools offering such programs, and how do you rate these programs overall, if you feel they should be offered.

4. Describe the atmosphere of the school (schools) your child (children) attends in this province and then describe the atmosphere of the school (schools) your child (children) previously attended. (In other words, how did you feel, and how do you think your child feels or felt upon going into a given school.)
5. After having had a child or children enrolled in schools both in Newfoundland and elsewhere, how do local schools compare with others in regards to identifying academic or social adjustment problems within your child and putting subsequent corrective measures in place to overcome these problems?
6. Tell me about some of the experiences (both positive and negative) you have had with teachers both in this province and elsewhere.
7. Describe experiences you have had in Newfoundland that make you feel there are some positive things about the local education system.
8. Describe some experiences you had that have left you feeling that

Newfoundland's education system is in need of improvement.

9. Tell me what you feel are some of the most important things an education system or school can offer a child to help him/her fit into society now, and later as a successful adult.
10. Do you see evidence that local schools are fulfilling these expectations you have of schools for your child (children)? Did the school (schools) your child (children) previously attended meet the criteria that you have expressed as important?
11. As a result of your experiences with education, schools and teachers, how do you feel Newfoundland's education system rates when compared to your experiences elsewhere? Is it better, worse or the same overall?
12. How would you respond to the statement that the overall education system in Newfoundland is inferior to the education system, or systems, your child or children, experienced in other provinces and countries?

Appendix E

Schedule for Data Collection and Analysis

Schedule for Data Collection and Analysis

<u>Date</u>	<u>Task</u>
February, 1998	Contact and Explain the Purpose of the Study to School Administrators; Principals' Distribution of Letters Outlining all Aspects of Research and Requesting Consent of Potential Participants to Children of CFA Parents
March, 1998	Parental Interviews
April, 1998	Follow-up Interviews, etc. (If and As Needed). Transcribing of Tapes, Early Data analysis
May, 1998	Data Analysis
May-July 1998	Writing
August- October 1998	Data Update and Re-analysis
November 1998- April 1999	Final Writing

