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Working Without Credit:

A Case Study of Quebec's IPL High-School Program

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March, 1995

A Thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
Master of Arts

ISBN 0-612-05429-2

Canada

Abstract

Working Without Credit:
A Case Study of Quebec's IPL High-School Program

In order to accommodate the needs and abilities of all students, many high schools have designed programs for those students who are unable to cope within regular high school streams. These alternative programs have included vocational education, work experience education, various forms of tracking, and within Quebec, the Individualized Paths for Learning Program (IPL). Individualized Paths for Learning was developed to allow "at risk" students to work towards their high school diploma at a more individualised pace, and to ease their transition into the work force through job skills training and work site experience. As this case study of an Individualized Paths for Learning program suggests however, IPL in practice provides very limited work and academic preparation for the students involved. Through interviews with students and staff, and participant observation within the classroom the limitations of the program become apparent. Yet paradoxically both students and staff were committed to the program and continued to subscribe to the importance of education which is fostered both socially and by the IPL program itself. Within this case study, the students' impressions of the IPL program were of special interest. It is their words, as those most involved and affected by it, that are used in analysis. While this study is specific to its setting it hopefully will provide insight into work education programs following similar principles.

Résumé

Afin de combler les besoins de tous les étudiants, plusieurs écoles secondaires ont dû institutionnaliser des programmes, pour les étudiants en difficultés, afin de faciliter l'obtention de leur formation générale. Dans la province de Québec, le programme de formation (C.P.F.) a été développé pour permettre aux étudiants qui risquent de décrocher de poursuivre leurs études et de faciliter leur transition graduelle entre le monde scolaire et le marché du travail. Après avoir étudié le programme C.P.F., je conclus qu'il offre très peu de préparation académique et peu de préparation pour le marche du travail. Les limitations du cheminement particulier de cette formation sont immanquables après avoir analysé les entrevues avec les étudiants, les professeurs, et les observations en classe. A ma surprise les étudiants et les professeurs sont toujours fidèles à ce programme et ils ont accepté l'importance de l'éducation prononcé par la société et ce programme. Il y a eu beaucoup d'importance accordé, dans cette étude, à la parole des étudiants parce qu'ils sont les personnes les plus touchés. L'analyse de ce programme est basée sur leurs paroles. Cette étude s'applique à l'école ou le programme est en place, par contre cette analyse sera utile pour développer d'autres programmes d'éducation au travail.

Acknowledgements

To Professor Prue Rains, my deepest gratitude
for her direction, wisdom and guidance,
and for the extra help that was beyond the call of duty.

To the other members of my thesis committee,
Professors Lucia Benaquisto and Morton Weinfeld,
and to the memory of Professor Hal Benenson,
for their encouragement in the early stages.

To the individuals who shared their experiences with me,
my thanks for making this possible.

To Marie-Anik Gagne,
for her support, patience and extensive help.

To my family,
all my love and thanks.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Prologue

This thesis is a case study of a work study program in a rural high school in Quebec. The program was designed to ease the transition from high school to work for academically unsuccessful students. The students spend the majority of the school year within the classroom focusing on basic academic and jobs skills supplemented with several two-week, on-the-job experience periods. Developed in 1989 by the Quebec Ministry of Education for implementation in high schools throughout the province, the Individualized Paths for Learning program replaced the out-dated short vocational program. Aimed at students 'at risk' for school failure or dropping out, the program emphasizes some of the basic elements of vocational and work experience curricula used in other high schools in Canada and elsewhere.

The Individualized Paths for Learning program is one of many attempts to design programs to address the varying abilities of students attending high school. Widely regarded as the only and the best place for teenagers (Powell et al,1985), high schools must accommodate the needs and abilities of all students. As Oakes (1985) observes, schools have two roles to play: "First, they are obliged to follow, reflect, and reproduce the nature of the society in which they exist. But second, they are also

responsible for changing society as it exists in favour of what "ought" to be" (1985:200). This means not only producing graduates with the expected credentials and abilities, but also seeing that as many students as possible meet these expectations. The challenge for high schools is to serve a varied student body (including gifted, bilingual, pregnant, drop-out and handicapped students) with curricula that are often criticized as traditional and geared towards middle class students . This effort has produced a variety of alternative programs and strategies for meeting the needs of different groups of students.

Tracking

One attempt to accommodate the various abilities of students in high schools has been the system of tracking. Also referred to as streaming or ability grouping, tracking is "the process whereby students are divided into categories so that they can be assigned in groups to various kinds of classes" (Oakes, 1985:3), and is an attempt both to meet individual needs and to provide all students with equal educational opportunities (Page, 1991). Oakes (1985) lists several of the goals or assumptions involved in tracking. It is assumed that students learn better when grouped with others of similar ability, and that these groups are easier for teachers to teach. Also, slower students are believed to develop more positive outlooks of themselves and school when grouped with students of like ability. Finally, track assignments are assumed to accurately reflect students' past achievements and abilities. On these grounds, both elementary

and high schools have used tracking as a means of serving their varied student populations.

Despite these justifications, tracking has received a rather negative review in the literature. Critics claim that tracking promotes inequality in educational outcomes through discrimination in track assignment (Schafer & Olexa, 1971) and because "discipline" often plays as significant a role as academic ability in deciding placement (Page, 1991). It is argued that assignments are inflexible and static (Lotto & Murphy, 1987, Schafer & Olexa, 1971) and that track placements "cement" the initial differences students bring with them to school, and the likelihood therefore that students will remain in the same track throughout high school (Oakes, 1982, Lee & Bryk, 1988).

The greatest concern over tracking has focused on students in the lowest tracks. Given the view of students' abilities (particularly those in the lower tracks) as static, lower track classes are often seen not as a place to "catch up" but as places "where students with less ability would have a chance to succeed because the material was at their 'level'" (Oakes et al, 1992:24). Lower track students are thus said to receive a poorer education, because academic knowledge is not given priority. Both students and teachers have lower expectations for these students' 'return' to the regular track or even graduation, and students tend often to have limited contact with other students and a limited involvement in the wider school culture (Schafer &

Olexa, 1971, Lotto & Murphy, 1987, Vanfossen et al, 1987). And, since being in a lower track has also been linked to dropping out of high school (Shavit, 1984 in Gamoran & Mare, 1989, Crespo & Michelena, 1981), the effectiveness of tracking at least for students in the lowest tracks has been called into serious question.

The problems with tracking are compounded by the mixture of low ability, low motivation and discipline problem students in lower track classes. As Oakes (1985) points out, there seem to be few distinctions made between students who are poor achievers because of lack of ability and students who are poor achievers because of disruptive behaviour or absenteeism. By grouping "those who find it hard to learn with those who find it hard to behave" (Oakes, 1985:90), the chances for slow students to learn in the lower tracks are decreased. And, by sending problem students to lower track classes regardless of their ability (Oakes, 1985, Powell et al, 1985), discipline problems are eliminated from the high tracks. While schools may have few options to offer lower track students they nonetheless are faced with "educating" these students, at least until they may legally leave school.

Despite the generally poor assessment tracking has received however, there remain questions as to whether dropping tracking based on ability would necessarily increase student achievement (Kulik & Kulik, 1982, Slavin, 1990, Allison & Paquette, 1991), not to mention the difficulties involved in teaching the

heterogeneous groups of students that would result (Slavin, 1990). While tracking is not ideal, some (Slavin 1990) have suggested that the solution may not be to abolish tracking altogether but to better serve those suffering the greatest disadvantage.

Vocational Education

Another tactic schools have used to meet the needs of "less academic" students while they are in high school and to better equip them for life after school is vocational education. Since John Dewey's Democracy and Education in 1944, vocational education has emphasized active experience in the classroom as a method to educate and train. Dewey's standpoint that "the only adequate training for occupations is training through occupations" (1944:310) is still respected today. He emphasized not only training but also an educational background and preparation to adapt. Even today, vocational education is encouraged to play a role in the context of a developing global economy when it is one component of a curriculum with education as its main goal (Corson,1985, McCulloch,1991).

More often than not, however, vocational education programs cannot meet these standards. First, for students to complete all of the requirements for high school graduation and complete vocational training would require some very capable students--capable students who normally are involved in the college-prepatory track and show little interest in vocational courses.

Second, the emphasis on credentials and academics tends to stigmatize alternatives, providing little status and few resources for programs that "non-academic" students are involved in. As a result, vocational education programs have become a key component of the tracking system and have suffered many of the same pitfalls and criticisms.

The research on vocational education has been quite extensive and consequently the criticisms are vast. Vocational education is seen as a repository for low-level students and students with behaviour problems (Oakes et al, 1992, Education and Human Resources Program Policy Brief, 1992) which denies their access to higher academics (Lotto & Murphy, 1987, Oakes, 1983). It is criticized for not being tied to labour market needs (Weisberg, 1983) and leading to jobs of only minimal skill (Oakes et al, 1992, Claus, 1990). It is further attacked for perpetuating class stratification not only through the types of vocational programs in which non-white and low-income students tend to be concentrated (Weisberg, 1983, Oakes, 1983, Oakes et al, 1992) but also by sustaining the assumption that some students (most often low-income and minority) cannot learn the things that are most valued by schools and society (Education and Human Resources Program Policy Brief, 1992:2). Finally vocational education has not been found to have the positive effect on drop-out rates initially hoped for (Claus, 1990). Rather, a study done in Quebec in 1979 found a greater likelihood for vocational students to drop out when compared to general (academic) students (Boudreault, 1979 in Crespo & Michelena,

1981). The strongest condemnation however comes from Oakes who states:"...vocational programs provided a means of encouraging working-class children not to drop out of school while keeping them from receiving an academic education" (Oakes, 1985:153). She further emphasizes her criticisms by suggesting that vocational graduates are less likely to be preferred by employers since they are likely to be seen as school failures having been unable to succeed in the regular stream (Oakes, 1985).

Amid such criticism, it has become harder to justify programs designed to make school more relevant for students by better preparing them for the labour market. Yet, as Snook (1991) observes, students are attracted to these programs that offer an active relationship to knowledge and a connection to their future aims and plans--to this extent he suggests vocational education may be serving a purpose. Furthermore, it is unlikely that most high schools are intentionally aiming to handicap students in vocational education programs. Indeed, many high schools take pride in offering alternatives to their students and spend considerable amounts of time trying to decide where a student should be placed. Despite these objectives, however, the outcomes of lower-track and vocational education placements are significant. Without any alternative that will offer low-ability, low-motivation and discipline problem students an equal chance at educational "academic" success, the damage done will probably continue.

A key issue that has arisen around alternative school programs aimed at work preparation is the extent to which these programs gear students towards certain kinds of work and reinforce the class inequality of the mental/manual job structure. Stemming from Bowles and Gintis' argument that the education system perpetuates, "the social relationships of economic life" (1976:11), several authors have argued that schools, and work preparation programs specifically encourage inequality. Schools are claimed to divide and prepare students for mental or manual jobs (Livingstone, 1987) and contribute to the maintenance of the existing power structure (Simon, 1983). Furthermore by focusing less on academics and more on life or work "skills", Korndorffer (1991) has found that "a differentiation of knowledge and access to knowledge, which reflects the deskilling and alienating aspects of the labour market for those in subordinate sectors, is inherent in the structures of transition education programmes" (1991:224). Alternative education programs such as vocational and work education programs therefore embody larger issues of class and stratification. These issues are reflected not only in their populations of largely low income, minority and low ability students but also their attempts, innocent or not, to offer alternatives to traditional academics. The concerns over equality are valid especially when low-income and minority students are over-represented in "special" classes. Also valid, however, are the concerns of teachers faced with "doing something" with non-academic and low-ability students. Both concerns must be taken into account when proposing solutions.

Another kind of alternative school program, closely tied to vocational education is work experience education. Work experience education is defined as "a situation in which people experience work tasks in real work situations, but without taking on the full identity of a worker" (Watts, A.G. (ed), Work Experience and Schools quoted in Jamieson et al, 1988:12). Work experience programs have been promoted in a similar fashion to vocational education, although they do not focus on the technology training of vocational education. They are seen to make school more relevant to students and to better prepare them for work after school. Four common emphases in work education programs are career development, work and employability skills training, providing non-school situations to encourage maturation amongst "problem" students, and, opportunities to develop basic technical skills (Simon et al, 1991). But, like vocational education, work experience education has also been accused of leaving its students "less educated" than students in the regular stream.

Stemming again from John Dewey, the emphasis on the quality of the work experience is essential (Dewey, 1938). However, determining the educational merit of different work experiences often becomes problematic. As Simon & Dippo (1987) point out, experience in and of itself is rarely educational, the challenge comes in having to "acknowledge student experience as a legitimate aspect of schooling while being able to challenge both

its content and its form during the educational process" (1987:104). Ideally, the work experience should support the students' educational objectives (Stern et al, 1990, Corson,1991) widening not limiting their possibilities once they have finished school. Criticisms arise when work experience programs accomplish less than this. Often work experience programs function as a component of the lowest levels in tracking and offer neither quality experiences nor experiences that gear students towards anything but low paying jobs. These types of programs are not associated with increased earnings or lower unemployment in the years after graduation (Stearn et al, 1990). Speaking generally about any school program aimed to ease the transition from school to work, Korndorffer claims, "such programmes facilitate keeping school leavers in a holding pattern until work is available, reproduce youth into the existing social relations of production, maintain a work ethic in young people through periods of unemployment, and place the blame for their unemployment on young people themselves" (1991:224). Similar negative assessments have been made about programs that give credits for a variety of student jobs when most students are holding service jobs with minimum wage and no skill training or advancement possibilities (Oakes et al, 1992:44). Thus work experience education has been criticized along the same lines as vocational education with the exception that in work experience education no specific vocational skills are assumed (mistakenly or not) to have been acquired.

The Quebec Individualized Paths for Learning Program

Another, and the final, alternative school program which will be the focus in the rest of this thesis, is Quebec's Individualized Paths for Learning program. It is a work-study program which combines certain elements of both tracking and work experience education.

The Individualized Paths for Learning for Students Aged 16 to 18 Program, required in all Quebec high schools as of September 1989, has the general aim to facilitate the students' transition from adolescence to adulthood (Gouvernement du Quebec 1988, 1989). This is to be achieved within the program by providing students with a 'basic education' and developing the behaviours required to be "responsible workers and autonomous adults" (Gouvernement du Quebec 1988, Lemay 1989). These goals are intended to expose students to the realities of the working world, increase their employability (Lemay 1989) and essentially equip them to lead a "productive life" (Gouvernement du Quebec 1989).

Eligibility for IPL is based on several factors. First, students must be 16 years of age by September 30th of their first year in IPL with the rare student being admitted at 15. Students are therefore in their final year of compulsory schooling. The second characteristic, and the one given most weight, is that students are "usually two or more years behind in English Language Arts and Mathematics and are therefore unable to return

to regular paths" (Gouvernement du Quebec 1988). While by no means a given with all students in IPL, it is further hypothesized that IPL students possess certain traits which have contributed to their failures--namely, "intellectual impairment or serious learning difficulties, usually accompanied by personal problems and a general lack of motivation is often the cause of this delay" (Lemay 1989:2).

The IPL program consists of 1) a general education section and 2) a work skills education section. The basic subjects in general education include English, French, math and religious education. In addition, there is the Life Skills Education Program covering the areas of nutrition, housing , health, safety, personal finances, rights and responsibilities, and an Introduction to the Work of Work program covering "a working knowledge of the world of work, a basic understanding of the economy, and the general knowledge necessary to perform a job" (Gouvernement du Quebec 1988:9). The second section, the Work Skills Education Section, has the aim of providing "a diversified, comprehensive training by teaching them a minimum of three occupations" (Gouvernement du Quebec 1988:10). This is the element of the program where students alternate between school and work and participate in work-study sessions. It is emphasized however that Work Skills Education is not a preparation for skilled labour as once provided by vocational education but is instead a preparation for jobs as helpers to skilled workers and for jobs without specific qualifications (Lemay 1989, Gouvernement du Quebec 1988).

The granting of academic credits in IPL is somewhat ambiguous. In the Guide to Educational Organization and Planning for IPL, published by the Ministry of Education in 1987, students were to receive credits if they attained "all of the compulsory objectives of an official program" (1987:29). It is not clear however if the IPL program itself was to be considered an "official program". Later in another document however, it is asserted that credits are to be given by the School Board to students who have completed the requirements for the General Education section including both Life Skills and Work of Work programs (Gouvernement du Quebec 1988, Lemay 1989). No credits are awarded for the work periods.

In addition to credits, students in IPL are also to receive an Attestation of Skills. The purpose of the Attestation is to recognize the skills achieved on the work-study sessions. Students therefore may acquire several Attestations of Skills, one for each job performed (Gouvernement du Quebec 1986, 1988). The Attestation of Skills is not considered a diploma or a leaving certificate.

These are the guidelines and recommendations for the organization of the Individualized Paths for Learning program provided by the Ministry of Education. Since its implementation in 1989 however, there have been few evaluations of the IPL program. Instead, a government study recommended several tactics to ensure that the program fulfils its intended goals. The information provided by the Ministry of Education emphasizes that

IPL should be regarded only as a temporary measure to be taken after all other alternatives have been tried (Gouvernement du Quebec 1986). IPL must focus on the potential of each student and not allow the work periods to overshadow the "basic education" (Gouvernement du Quebec 1986). Also, means must be taken to avoid making IPL a dead-end but rather to show employers based on the Attestation of Skills that the student has skills (Conseil superieur de l'education Quebec 1989). It is further recognized that there may be difficulties finding adequate, educational work sites but, as with the program as a whole, schools must not give in to complaisance nor must they submit to the illusion that their "less able" students will greatly improve (Conseil superieur de l'education Quebec 1989). These are the basic tenets and evaluations of the Individualized Paths for Learning program.

IPL at Eastman Regional High School

This case study of how one Individualized Paths for Learning program operated in practice was carried out at "Eastman Regional High School" in "Eastman", Quebec, a small, farming and small-industry town located forty five minutes, southwest of Montreal. Eastman is a community of 1500 predominantly white inhabitants in the centre of a valley of farming towns, and contains the only English high school in the area. Although students are bused in to the high school from a wide area, the valley population and the student body (approx. 800 students) is small enough that many families know each other and at least know of the school faculty

members from their older children or from having attended the high school themselves.

Eastman Regional High School sports a strong athletic tradition in basketball, football, field hockey and track and field, and academically its students have won several scholarships with many going on to CEGEP or college. The majority of the student body are anglophone but there is also a significant minority of students with a francophone mother tongue.

Students enter the school in grade seven in one of four levels: 1) the Immersion program where students have several of their courses in grades 7 and 8 in French and take advanced French courses; 2) the regular program or regular stream; 3) the Extended Cycle One program (ECOP) where students who are academically or behaviourally "behind" complete grades 7 and 8 in three years instead of two; and 4) the Special Education program for educable, mentally retarded students. While the majority of students remain in the Immersion program or the regular stream, more than half of the students in the Extended Cycle One Program move on to Individualized Paths for Learning in the year they turn sixteen.

Individualized Paths for Learning (IPL) has two levels, IPL1 for students who are at the grade ten age level (sixteen), and then IPL2 the following year for students who are seventeen or eighteen. While IPL students do not attend classes with the

regular stream students, they share physical education classes, their recesses, lunch hours, assemblies and extracurricular activities with the rest of the students in the school. A few IPL students are partially integrated into regular stream classes. Despite this overlap, their friendships tend to remain within the IPL group and their participation in school events is limited. As a result, much of what students talked about, and the classroom goings-on involved other students within IPL. They were a relatively small and unified group (in total only twenty-six students).

The size and cohesiveness of the IPL student group facilitated my study of the students and their program. My presence in the classroom and subsequent interviewing became easier as the word spread quickly about why I was there and what kind of things I wanted to know about. I sat in on classes from the end of September 1993 until the beginning of January 1994, and conducted most of my interviews with students in the December of that span. Interviews with teachers and principals were done in January. After sitting in the classroom to observe IPL in action I was especially interested in hearing the students' impressions of the program, both its benefits and its drawbacks. In the analysis that follows, I use their words to present a case study of the IPL program from the point of view of those most involved and affected by it. While this case study is, by nature, specific to its setting, it hopefully will provide some insight into IPL programs in other high schools as well as work education programs following similar principles.

Summary

The criticisms of vocational and work experience education present these programs as very limited options serving neither students or schools. High schools must nevertheless still deal with the wide range of abilities of students, and must in particular offer some incentive for remaining in school to those students who are not academically inclined and who are not college bound. The Individualized Paths for Learning program is one program designed to serve these students by incorporating general and work experience education within the tracked school system. Individualized Paths for Learning programs are open to the same sorts of critical analysis presented above, but an essential element overlooked in most of the research on alternative school programs, is the voice of the students themselves. Their perspective highlights the discrimination they do or do not experience, the extent they feel prepared for life after school and other characteristics of work education programs that school faculty and observation alone cannot reveal. While teachers' accounts and participant observation provide a vital understanding of a program's workings, the student's own experience offers insights that are usually overlooked. These insights are featured in this case study of an Individualized Paths for Learning program at Eastman Regional High School. While this study is specific to the school in which it was conducted, the findings and the issues raised address the IPL program more generally, and other programs like it.

Chapter Two

The Staff View of IPL

IPL at Eastman Regional High School

Eastman Regional High School, with approximately 800 students, is a relatively small high school. It has a staff of only 53 full-time teachers and 5 student services personnel including a guidance counsellor, a pastoral animator, a work-study coordinator and dropout prevention counsellor, a part-time social worker, and a part-time nurse. There are also two security and supervision people. In the office, "Mr.Johnson" is the principal in charge of the grade 11 students , "Mrs.Rigby" is the vice-principal for grade 9 and 10 students and "Mr.Evans" is the vice principal for students in grades 7 and 8. Both vice-principals were in their first year on the job in September 1993.

Students in the Individualized Paths for Learning program had a limited involvement with the school faculty. Most of their time was spent with "Mrs.Joyce", the primary IPL teacher who taught the students English, Life Skills, World of Work, computers and child care (female students only). Especially around work periods, students had significant contact with "Sarah Parrish", the work-study coordinator and dropout prevention counsellor who met with students to discuss the work program and their job opportunities, and visited students at their work sites along with Mrs.Joyce; Ms.Parrish also ate lunch in the chapel

which was used as a hang-out by some IPL students. The teachers for IPL math, French, phys.ed, woods, auto, metals and weight training (for the boys) and foods and nutrition (for the girls) were the only other teachers IPL students were involved with. In the Main office, most students had only limited contact with Mr.Johnson and Mrs.Rigby. Overall therefore the IPL students had very limited contact with the high school staff with the exception of their main IPL teacher and the work-study coordinator. The IPL program held marginal status within the school even though it was one of the only alternatives to the regular and advanced streams. It was a marginal program in the sense that it served relatively few students, academically poor students and with limited resources.

In the 1993-1994 school year there were twenty six IPL students in total, seventeen boys and nine girls. In IPL1 (grade ten equivalent) the break down was ten boys and four girls, and in IPL2 (grade eleven equivalent) there were seven boys and five girls. Within each level of IPL there were corresponding levels of the core subjects such as English, math, French, computer science and World of Work. The Life Skills course combined all IPL students together.

Within these courses however, there were various levels of ability amongst the students. First, there were the majority of IPL students who were completing the 'basic education' courses of IPL English, math and French. These courses were rudimentary and adapted to the level of IPL students. They were not credit

courses since there were no equivalent courses within the recognized Ministry of Education high school curriculum. Second, there were students in IPL who were completing the requirements for "regular" core subjects such as English, math or French but because of discipline or scheduling problems were completing them within the IPL classroom. If students successfully passed the Christmas and final exams for these courses they received the appropriate credits. Finally, there were students in the IPL program whose involvement was limited to the Life Skills, computer and World of Work courses and the work periods--for all other subjects they were integrated into the regular stream and received the according credits. However, very few of the students who were completing the requirements for regular stream courses were doing so at the grade level for their age. They generally were completing grade nine requirements whether they were in IPL1 or IPL2. Consequently at the end of IPL2, most students who had successfully completed one or more "regular" courses, only had credits for these grade nine courses. These issues--the limited accreditation, and the wide range of abilities among IPL students--affected the pace and level of difficulty within the classroom. Before entering the classroom however, it is useful to look at how teachers and school officials at Eastman--particularly those involved with the IPL program--defined the program and its goals.

Eastman Educators' Conceptions of the IPL Program

In discussing the general goals of the IPL program and its key component, the work program, the school faculty at Eastman Regional High School emphasized the flexibility offered by these programs in serving students at various levels of ability and in setting goals according to student needs. Beyond these broad statements however, there was surprising variability in how the teachers and principals presented the program and what they expected the students to achieve. The goals or objectives essentially broke down into two broad categories. First, the program was touted as a preparation for work and for life after school. Second, IPL was seen to promote a sense of responsibility and maturity in its students.

The emphasis on preparing students for work and for life can be seen in the following excerpts from interviews with the school faculty. The primary IPL teacher, Mrs.Joyce, for instance, outlined one of the goals as: "one of the things we're trying to do under this program is say, yes, you can hold a job, this is how you get it, this is how you keep it". She summarized the Life and Work World courses, two of the courses she teaches, by observing: "Well, the goal for the Life course is to outfit the student for independent living, ok, and the goal for Work is to give the student the necessary skills to get a job and stay at a job, and keep a job, so those are the overall global aims". The coordinator of the work program also mentioned the practical aspects of the program, pointing to the skills students acquired:

"They have the ability to know what's important in looking for a job, what's important in finding a job, what's important in keeping a job". While the teachers and principals emphasized these work skills, they also emphasized other practical life skills. One of the IPL teachers, for instance, referred to one goal of the Life course as: "We try to give them a really solid background in all the practical skills you need to live on your own", later adding that the IPL program gave students "time with simpler subjects" and a chance to be with one core teacher. Mrs.Rigby, one of the vice-principals, similarly focused on the varying needs of IPL students, describing the IPL program as "aimed at dealing with youngsters who are more concrete learners, who need to see the end result, kind of, of schooling". Despite this mention of academic goals however, only one of the six teachers and principals interviewed mentioned helping students graduate from high school as a possible program objective and even this was prefaced by "on the other hand most of those kids in there know that they're probably not going to get a high school leaving". It is evident, therefore, that the IPL students were regarded as having special needs that precluded graduation from high school. The school personnel thus framed their understanding of the IPL program goals--to facilitate the transition to work and life--within this limit.

Beyond this emphasis on work skills and quasi-"academic" goals, the Eastman educators also expected the IPL program to produce more general behavioral changes, namely responsibility and maturity. Sarah Parrish, the coordinator of the work

program, for instance, observed, "Basically, what I think we're working towards through the work program is teaching them a sense of responsibility, of maturity, so that when they do finish high school 'cause they're very, they're almost at a younger age when they're in IPL, so we're working towards teaching them that 'yes, you have the ability to be responsible and mature and hold a job', that's one of the main goals". This emphasis on personal responsibility as one of the "main goals" was echoed by another IPL teacher who viewed the program as "basically training them to be responsible to future jobs".

The Eastman educators hoped the program would impact other job-related behaviours as well, such as self-confidence to overcome histories of failure, "appropriate language" and vocabulary for the work force, and respect for others as "something that's just necessary for successful life". They also stressed the impact of work experience in altering behaviour; as a vice-principal explained, the goal of the program was "just to introduce the youngsters to the possibility of themselves as workers, to develop in them a sense that they will be able to get a job or to do a job, in other words that they don't develop the mentality that they will perhaps never work, (but) that they will just be part of the system, so one of the goals is to get them right on the job".

School faculty members at Eastman thus stressed a variety of objectives for the IPL program, but essentially their justifications for the Individualized Paths for Learning program did not diverge far from the Ministry presentation of the IPL program as an educational track for students who cannot keep up in the regular track and are thus being geared for working life.

Eastman Educators' Conceptions of IPL students

In the course of discussion with the principals and IPL teachers, many referred to the widely variant ability levels of the IPL students, stressing the flexibility of the IPL program and its adaptability to each individual's abilities. At the same time, however, almost every staff member interviewed categorized the IPL students into three distinct types, having to do with the reasons for their placement in the IPL program. Describing them as a "mixed bag" of students, the Eastman educators put greatest emphasis on the students they spoke of as "intellectually unable" to get a high school leaving, "low achievers" or "students with different learning disabilities". This group of IPL students were described as "reading at a grade two to four level" and not having "enough intelligence to make it through high school". As such, this group of students appears to be the clientele for whom the IPL program was designed: students unable to cope within the regular stream. A vice-principal acknowledges this group in her description of some IPL students as "truly the youngster who needs that academic level". In addition to this first type of "non-academic" IPL student, however, there were two other 'types'

of IPL students mentioned by the principals and teachers.

The second group were troublesome students, students with behavioral, emotional and motivational problems who "can't cope in the classroom" and who "end up in that program because no other program can accommodate them". Many were "chronic absentees" said to lack both discipline and good work habits. Academic ability was not the defining issue with this group, indeed, these "problem" students' were described as intellectually "quite capable of getting a high school leaving", of having the "ability to be in regular and even above average (classes) in some cases" by the IPL teacher and one vice-principal. This group of students became IPL students because of their troublesome behaviour and absence of alternatives for dealing with "problem" students. These students were assigned to the IPL program in part to let them try to catch up on the work they had missed in their regular classes (for whatever reason), and, in part, to prepare them for the work force, in case they did not manage to catch up.

The third group of students in IPL were a middle group--students who "have just enough ability to get through high school" with some help. Mrs.Joyce, the IPL teacher, described the role of IPL for these students: "We're trying to provide a program for those students who are having trouble in regular stream and basically when I get them they're failing...and what we try to do with those students is integrate them as much as possible into regular stream". Although none of the faculty and

staff members gave a breakdown as to the number of students in each group, from observation it appears that the majority of the students in IPL are in the two latter groups, the "behaviour-problem" or the "extra help" students rather than in the first group of "slow and incapable" students.

Although the Eastman educators identified three different types of students in IPL, they were nonetheless aware that these distinctions did not protect IPL students from being stereotyped and stigmatized in the wider school culture. For instance, when asked how they thought other Eastman students and teachers saw IPL and the work program, the teachers and principals reported (as the IPL students also did) that other students called the IPL students the bobo class, the bozo group, losers or low achievers--thus, in effect, viewing all IPL students as intellectually deficient. Even more disturbing, however, other teachers were reported as holding equally discrediting conceptions of IPL students. Mrs.Joyce described some of the fears teachers had about IPL: "Teachers are afraid, they won't willingly take an IPL class. They see these students as threatening, as major behaviour problems, which is not generally true, unless you start getting them into too large a group". Ms.Parrish, the coordinator and two of the principals qualified their statements, but made similar observations: "Most teachers are very supportive but there are some that think it's not worth it, these kids aren't going to make it so why should I bother with them, and that's frustrating"(Ms.Parrish); "I would say the staff almost perceive it like the students, they're in the bobo group, and

that's a big problem, it can really interfere with how things happen"(Mr.Evans); and, "I think any teacher that's been involved has a deeper understanding, they know that the kids are all different and are there for different reasons and so on, but you would definitely find a percentage of the staff who kind of dismisses that as the area for losers, I think you'd find that in any school"(Mrs.Rigby).

When Mrs.Rigby generalizes her answer by saying "I think you'd find that in any school", she may well be identifying a 'normal' or common reaction to lower-track students. Page (1991) documents teachers' perceptions of lower-level students as 'distracted', 'uncivilized' and 'beyond training'. And, as Ms.Parrish points out, the consequences of these attitudes can be significant: "it doesn't happen a lot but when that one teacher says something like that, or makes a comment to one of the students, it affects that student, and that student shares it with the rest of the IPL students, and therefore they lose their confidence that we're trying to build". In further recognition of the stigma that IPL students face, two of the principals mentioned the possibility of changing the name of IPL so that students would not get labelled, considering this especially important for those students who are "just on the border of being able to complete (a) high school diploma".

The conception of the IPL students as different from other students, associated with the stigmatization of the IPL program, was amplified in a variety of ways. As Bowles and Gintis (1976) and Oakes (1985) have observed, schools reinforce differences amongst students, further validating the failure of lower track students as a personal one. Thus, at Eastman, the teachers and principals emphasized how IPL students differed from regular students in a wide variety of their academic and behavioral ways. IPL students were characterized as having low self-esteem, not being involved in the school culture, and as being inclined towards trouble-making. As "Mrs.Folmer", one of the Extended Cycle One teachers who also teaches the IPL foods and nutrition course, put it: "They (IPL students) don't get involved in school activities, they stay on the fringe, they stay together as a group, um, they like to be, um, discipline problems...they will always be the kids who are outside smoking, they'll always be the ones who are into mischief, if there's a chance to be...they have no motivation to be part of their school and to you know, sort of improve themselves... the majority of them are, they sort of don't fit the mold." Lack of involvement was also mentioned by Mrs.Joyce who suggested that the "group identity" IPL students develop from spending so much time together may be the cause of their inappropriate behaviour: "Is it the behaviour problems that ended them up in this group, or have they developed these behaviours because they're in the group?" Mr.Johnson, the head principal, felt that IPL students might have different interests and patience levels than regular students. When asked if the work study program might be a good idea for all students, he

responded, "If we were to send out all of our students, I mean, they're not all going to want to go out and sweep floors and dust shelves...our regular grade 11 students aren't going to be interested in that kind of a work study experience".

In identifying these special characteristics of IPL students, the Eastman educators nonetheless recognized that the existence of a hostile school environment for IPL students which encouraged their misbehaviour. As Mr.Evans, a vice-principal, notes, "They perceive themselves as being discriminated against, often by everybody, including teachers, because they're low on the social totem pole". Sarah Parrish similarly recognized this differential treatment: "There's not a lot of behaviour problems, but there are some and I think that's where they come from, from the not feeling like the rest of the school, not being treated like the rest of the school".

While the Eastman educators expressed surprise at how little effort IPL students put into school, they generally expected IPL students to be unruly and boisterous students. Mrs.Folmer described them as "always be(ing) the ones who are into mischief" and as "hav(ing) no motivation to be part of their school", while Mrs.Joyce expressed her exasperation with IPL students generally: "I just feel as though I'm teaching the same thing forever and they don't know it". While these students were behind academically, for most, low ability was not the key reason for their involvement in IPL. Yet the poor academic ability of IPL students was a key theme in educators' discussions of both the

IPL students and the program. This characterization of IPL students as low achievers contributed to the stigmatization and marginalization IPL students. It is interesting that in this context where IPL students were stereotyped as academically deficient--as poor readers unable to focus on long-term projects such as reading a novel, they were nonetheless very quick with sarcastic responses and comments that suggested that they were bright and knowledgable in other respects.

How these conceptions were expressed in dealing with students

The characterization of IPL students as low achieving and marginal students was conveyed in the interactions faculty had with students. Take, for example, the interaction between coordinator Sarah Parrish and IPL student Christian over his work study placement. Christian, an IPL2 student integrated into regular stream classes for most subjects and involved in the minimum number of IPL courses required to be in the program, wanted to carry out his work-study within the school in order not to miss his regular classes, but refused to consider maintenance work. In expressing her exasperation with his refusal, Sarah Parrish said, "He has a real attitude problem", thus treating Christian's response as a behaviour issue rather than, for example, a desire to do something more interesting or less demeaning particularly in the presence of other students. (Subsequently, an agreement was made to allow Christian to work as a teacher's aid during the periods he would have normally had IPL classes). The involvement of the teachers and principals in

non-academic aspects of IPL students' lives provide other examples. In a visit to an IPL student at his work place during the work-study period, for example, Ms.Parrish and Mrs.Joyce questioned the student about completing his journal, his required community work, and also spoke to the student's father about his lack of effort. After we left the work site, Mrs.Joyce said, "I hate to go through his father, but that's our only chance that we'll get him to do anything". Sometimes these negative characterizations of IPL students were cloaked as concern or advice to urge compliance as when Mrs.Joyce announced to the class; "What you do now will influence what you do when you're going to get a job. Some of you have to clean up your act in the community".

These efforts at exercising power or control through threats, put-downs and negative generalizations were evident in both classroom observations and discussions with the Eastman teachers and principals. Thus, Mrs.Joyce attempted to exercise her authority in her comments to a student: "Shawn, you failed last term and you'll fail this term if you don't do your work". Even encouragement or compliments had a double edge, offering praise but at the same time suggesting that the efforts were not quite 'good enough'. In explaining how to write a "regular" exam, Mrs.Joyce said, "You'll fail because you don't know the format, not because you don't have the ability", and in congratulating students on their work-study performances she said to Patricia, an IPL2 student, "The employer was really pleased with your work which is especially important with a first time

employer because if it goes well the first time and then the second time things don't work out, the employer is usually still willing to take students". Again, after Christian explained that he was working as a teacher's aid, Mrs.Joyce said, "And in some cases, Christian, you made a real difference". Thus teachers seemed to limit the actual encouragement offered to students in order to maintain authority, and control the potentially disruptive classroom climate.

Lowered expectations for student work

The Eastman teachers and principals also expressed their negative conceptions of IPL students as low achievers in lowered expectations for their academic work in class. In many respects, IPL students were seen as capable of very little. Assignments were not individualized to fit student ability, assignment due dates were simply very lenient (with written and verbal reminders given until term marks were due), rather than individualized to meet students' abilities. Attempts to build up students' confidence simply meant that most students were "overly successful" and only a few were in the least bit challenged by the exercises and assignments. The lessons encouraged students to relax about school, but were often unmotivating--such as finding definitions in work books or improving headlines--and the worksheets and exercises often had only one correct answer, as is the case in many lower-track exercises (Page 1991). While students were encouraged to do work on their own, many of the lessons either became group discussions or the teacher took over,

controlling the pace, direction and even the topics of an exercise. She was then surprised when she got no response, saying, "Come on guys, you don't take notes, you don't pay attention, you don't study, how the booming hell do you think you're going to learn?" As a result, knowledge became "univocal": "indisputable and unambiguous and it is what one person--the teacher--has in mind" (Page 1991,p.204). In this situation students risked being wrong, but they could also be assured that eventually the teacher would give the right answer. As an example, in getting students to discuss designing a union contract, Mrs.Joyce rather quickly resorted to directing them: "What other benefits are there? I'll give you some hints--holidays, what holidays are you going to have? Sick days, you have to specify how many sick days you can have". She got everyone to write down their own ideas of holiday and sick days and hand in the sheet. In this and other cases students really had to put in very little effort. Along these same non-demanding lines, tests could be made up if missed, and students were encouraged to re-take tests when their results were poor with the incentive from the teacher that, "I won't let your mark go down, but I will let you improve it". Despite this leniency, the IPL teacher did nonetheless occasionally express occasional surprise at the students' lack of interest. When handing back an assignment to one student who normally got his work done, Mrs.Joyce said, "You didn't read the book, Julien, you were supposed to read it"; when he shrugged, she said, "Well, the mark will stick because I handed this back to you before". He didn't seem too upset. She said, "You don't usually get the lazies,

Julien, you usually get your work done". As Page (1991) found in her study of lower-track classrooms, teachers tend to predict failure with these students but at the same time urge them to try, and themselves try to make students care about school. By giving re-tests when students did not do well on an original test, by giving marks to students who simply brought their duo-tangs to class, by congratulating a student merely for handing in his homework on time, and by telling students to read while half the class is being given an oral re-test, the standards were set very low for IPL students.

Within the work program as well, there were very low expectations that students would be able to perform anything but menial jobs. Although most students were encouraged to find their own jobs, the opportunities available for a two-week work period were more often than not, low-skilled, low paying jobs. Students worked at feedmills, on farms, stocking shelves at a pharmacy, in videostores, cleaning with the school maintenance department and unpacking fruit cake tins at a bakery, to name a few positions. These were jobs which, as one principal put it, regular students "aren't going to want to do". These are also jobs that require little training and can likely be obtained without experience or a high school diploma.

The IPL program therefore set the stage for lower expectations on the part of the faculty and little effort on the part of the students. Because of the low expectations for IPL students and the consequences of this in the classroom, the IPL

students put very little effort into their work. This simply justified and reinforced the low expectations and stereotypes the faculty had of IPL students. The program thus perpetuated the perceptions and behaviours of faculty and students.

Chapter Three

The Student View of IPL

Stigma

One of the most striking features in the interviews with teachers, principals and students is the perceived degree of stigma attached to the IPL program within the wider school culture. When asked the question, "How do you think other students see IPL and the work program?", all students had negative things to say. From the "bobo" or "stupid" class to "retards", "welfares", "delinquents" or "drug addicts", IPL students perceived a very strong and hostile view of IPL and themselves from their peers. Some students described how the name calling extended to treatment in the school and derogatory remarks about IPL students' potential. One student said, "I think they kind of look down on us a bit, like we're not as smart as everybody else, I notice those things, just the way they talk to us and the way they treat us and things. I just don't like it". Another said, "They think it's like for retards, yeah, a lot of people they bug us about it". Another reported, "There are the ones that will say, "Oh well, they're not ever going to amount to anything even if they do have that work program thing, you know they're probably going to have low-rated jobs and stuff like that and they're not going to earn very much money", and stuff like that. They think we're all going to be on welfare when we get older". Some students suggested changing the name

'IPL' to just 'ten'(grade ten) or 'work world' while others mentioned having denied being in IPL to other students, noting that "Everybody thinks IPL students are stupid, I don't know why, it's always been like that". The ostracism and negative evaluation directed at IPL thus concerned the IPL students themselves because it was a determining factor of their status in the school culture. The stigma came not only from their peers, but also from some teachers.

Beyond this recognition of the attitudes held by students and teachers outside the IPL program, there were a variety of beliefs, behaviours and actions on the part of participants (both students and teachers) within the program that reinforced the differentiation of IPL students from other students at school.

The IPL students saw themselves as different from the "regular" students in several ways. Not only did they describe themselves as having problems in school or learning disabilities, but some also noted class distinctions. One student, for instance, noted the economic differences, saying, "There's a few people in here that have high class, like wear expensive clothes and that...us we're out working our butts off to make money just to have spare money to buy clothes with". Another student mentioned IPL students as being "lower class" when asked how he thought other students saw IPL and work program. A third student, Timothy, an IPL2 student, felt that his lower class status mattered only after his involvement in IPL. When asked about other students' opinions of IPL, he said, "We don't really

get talked to by the high class group, you know I used to talk to them last year, not last year but the year before when I was in grade 8 and grade 9 with them, we were all best buddies, but when I hit IPL, suddenly nobody talks to me". Thus the IPL students saw economic as well as academic differences between themselves and other students in a school and social milieu that was predominantly middle class. These differences contributed to their non-participation in school extracurricular activities and interaction with other students. The IPL students tended to hang around together and very few were involved in sports or other student activities. Their participation in the wider school culture was restricted to the IPL peer group.

Placement in IPL rather than Choice

The IPL students' impressions of themselves as students and why they were "put" in IPL were other factors that served to differentiate them from the rest of the school. Many of the students cited academic or behaviour problems as the cause of their placement. In most cases students blamed themselves rather than the school or teachers for having failed and been put in IPL. They spoke of being immature, fooling around, skipping, not being good readers or spellers and being slow learners. When asked if they had had any choice in entering IPL, students again spoke of their learning problems and failing classes or a grade as the reason for "being stuck" in IPL. They saw very little option and said the decision had been made for them by principals or teachers. A few students initially questioned their placement

and tried to get out of IPL, but eventually gave up and resigned themselves to being in IPL. No matter what their reasons, however, the students felt they had no control over their placement in IPL or their possible departure. As the exasperation of these two students shows, they felt they had no say in what track they were in and had resigned themselves to IPL; the first students said, "I'd prefer not to be in IPL if I could, I'd love to get out of there, like, I've worked and worked and I just got to the point where I said, oh, well, screw it, it's not getting me anywhere"; the second student observed, "Really, you don't have a choice, they put you in IPL and you really have to stay there because I tried it at the beginning of the year and they said they were keeping me in IPL". The sense of futility is further elaborated by Lauren, a second year IPL student, who spoke of her shock at being put in the Extended Cycle One program (ECOP) straight out of elementary school, and how she decided "Well hey, if I want to get out of here I better start passing". She got moved to the regular stream, explaining "Well, that year I was doing it. I was passing some things but I got sick a lot...I missed over 48 days of school, so I told them, 'Well, just repeat me, I know what I'm doing'...I repeated and I did my year and they promised me they would put me in regular grade nine. I just passed but yet they didn't feel I was good enough, so they put me in IPL which they weren't supposed to". She later added, "They won't let me out, no matter what, I've tried, they said no way". Lauren has resigned herself to IPL, even though she believes she could complete the courses necessary for a high school diploma. Although this student and the several

others who disagreed with their placement in IPL thus questioned the actions of the school for putting them in IPL, they nonetheless also faulted themselves, citing behaviours such as absenteeism (even if due to sickness) or "I horse around a lot in class, I don't pay attention" as the ultimate reason they were in the program.

Why they wanted out

While students shared their sense of confinement at being committed to IPL against their own wishes and of being "stuck" there, they gave a variety of reasons for wanting to get out of IPL. Some of the students said the pace was too slow and the work was boring, while others pointed to the stigma and the feeling that they didn't fit in. Almost all wanted out because they weren't going to get a diploma at the end.

In terms of the program demands, students described how little effort they had to put in to get through IPL. One student said, "I find in IPL they don't really give a hoot about how far you're going to get". Another observed that, "IPL is just like, uh, if you want to do it then you do the work and the teacher doesn't chase after you, sort of, like "where is the work", if you want the marks you do your work". A third said, "In IPL, it doesn't matter what , you get a leaving certificate, and then you come back for your credits in Adult Ed.". One of the phrases used by several students in discussing both the IPL program generally, and the work program more particularly, was that they

were a "waste of time". In terms of course work, most assignments were not individualized and the level of difficulty was relatively low to accommodate the needs of "slower" students. Class periods were filled with requests for "late"assignments, interruptions, re-tests, revision of assignments as a group even when some students hadn't finished, and shifts of topic from academic to entertaining or "relevant" materials. Two students, both of whom were integrated into several regular classes, commented on the simplicity of the IPL classes: "It feels like grade two to me, it's just ridiculous, it's just a waste of time", and, "It's too easy, all I do, I don't do anything, every day I screw around and do nothing". In part, the sense that they were wasting their time may have stemmed from their comparison of IPL course work to what they thought regular students were doing in class. Almost all of the students described IPL as a lot easier than the classes regular students were taking at their grade level. Some students spoke of their experiences of having been in both regular and IPL classes, "When I started out the year, I was doing IPL in English and it was way too easy, so I went in regular English and I don't know, I think it's (IPL) easier work anyway and you don't get as much homework". Another student said, "It's like doing grade 7 work compared to grade 11 work". Christian commented that not only was IPL easier but "the classes are stupid, like last year we had fire safety, it's all just stuff that has to do with regular life....it's just like regular stuff that anybody would know, it wasn't stuff like math or ecology or anything like that". Some of the students nonetheless recognized the difficulties they would face in

regular classes, pointing out: "If I had a choice to go to regular or IPL, I'd pick IPL....'cause I just bomb in the regular" and "some parts (in regular classes) might be too hard in regular so IPL might be better".

Nearly every student, through the course of interviews, pointed out that not getting a diploma that the end of IPL was another big problem. All of the students were vividly aware that they would not receive a diploma, even though none of them were clear on what courses they needed to get a diploma[1]. Several students mentioned they would "come back" to Adult Education in order to get their diploma, thus emphasizing the significance it held. A few of the students questioned not only the usefulness of IPL, but also why they continued going to school when they would not receive a diploma. For example, "I can't get a real diploma so it's (the IPL program) not that good", and "I don't know, there was a time when I thought it was alright (not getting a diploma) and there's times when I think it's not worth going to school if you're just going to get a certificate".

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[1] To receive a high school diploma students must receive at least a grade of 60% in the following courses:Secondary 4 and 5 (grade 10 and 11) English Language Arts; Secondary 5 (grade 11) French; Secondary 4 or 5 (grade 10 or 11) Moral Religious Education; Canadian History (normally taken in secondary 4 (grade 10)). Students need a total of 130 course credits (accumulated from secondary 1 to secondary 5 (grade 7 to 11)), with a minimum of 20 credits at the secondary 5 level in order to graduate.
While these requirements were unclear to IPL students, most regular students were also uncertain about what courses they needed to pass and the total credits necessary in order to graduate from high school.

Many of the students also had complaints about the work-study section of the program, claiming they thought they missed too much school. For example, Lauren, a second year student who was very conscientious about her work said: "You're wasting your time for the first year I found, like I don't want to do it again this year...like I feel I'm missing too much class". Another student questioned the link between school and the work program; when she was asked if she thought the work program was a good program, she said, "In a way Yes, because you get experience, and in a way No because it's just a waste of time and I don't see what it involves in the school". This further emphasizes some of the program's difficulties that arise from presenting the work-study section as a school course ostensibly serving the school's requirements but without course credit. The credibility of the program is compromised when even the students involved question its validity.

The issues regarding the accreditation of the IPL program created serious problems for both the students and the school. At Eastman Regional High School the basic organization put forth by the Ministry of Education for IPL was implemented, but modified as much as possible to suit the needs of the students and the school--to give students as many credits as possible under the Ministry guidelines[2]. Under the guidelines of the

[2] The changes the school has introduced include the addition of a computer course within the general education section as one of the core courses along with English, French and math. Religious education, a required course in Quebec's high schools, is taught as part of the the Life Skills program. And, child care, and foods and hospitality have been added for the female students and

Quebec Ministry of Education's accreditation system, however, there are no equivalent credited courses for Eastman Regional's general education IPL courses--therefore IPL students do not receive credit for their general education courses. (They do receive a Statement of Educational Achievement which lists the number of hours they have spent within each general education course[3]). The accreditation is very much dependent on the Ministry's existing course curriculum. Each individual school must adapt its courses sufficiently to meet the requirements of a Ministry credited course in order for the course to be recognized by the Quebec Ministry of Education. At Eastman, the IPL program with its limited teacher resources and funding, added to the wide range of student abilities, does not allow for much curriculum adaptation beyond those courses such as Life Skills and the boys' shop courses which are already similar to Ministry courses. The IPL program therefore was designed by the Ministry of Education to help schools deal with non-academic students, but it only

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woodworking, and auto and metals have been added for the male students as courses to be taken by IPL students. Students must also have only failed one year of high school in order to be recommended to IPL, as opposed to the Ministry's ruling of being two-years behind in English language arts and mathematics.

[3] By special arrangement at Eastman Regional High School, students are awarded credits for religious education under the Life Skills program which is deemed to cover the Ministry requirements for the religious education course. They also receive credit for physical education which they take in conjunction with "regular" students. Furthermore, IPL students who successfully complete the requirements for "regular" courses such as mathematics, English or French either through having been integrated into a "regular" class or through completing the course curriculum in the IPL classroom and then writing the final exam with "regular" students, are awarded the credits for the course. Finally, under the auspices of Industrial Arts the boys receive credit for their woodworking and auto and metals courses as there are equivalent Ministry courses.

credits these students for their work if the school adapts their courses to meet the requirements of regular Ministry courses! Within Eastman Regional High School, there is neither the time nor the resources to adjust the IPL courses to fit the Ministry requirements and keep the courses at a level where all IPL students can follow along and hopefully pass. As a result, students do not receive academic credit for any of their general education courses or their World of Work course.

The school faculty also commented on the difficulties of having neither diploma nor credits in the IPL program. After it was mentioned that the students complained about not getting a diploma, one principal suggested: "Yes, as you say, really it should be a diploma course you know, it should be something that's worked out so they can get enough credits together, I mean that's, it must feel discriminatory". Mrs.Joyce and Sarah Parrish also noted the significance of credits, and the implications the absence of credit has both in terms of the students' self-esteem and their motivation to stay in school. When asked if she would change anything in the program for example, Mrs.Joyce responds, "The only thing I could, I'd like to see, is credit given for the fact they have, recognize it as a program, give it a certificate, give them some sort of credit for having accomplished what they've accomplished and you know, that would give it legitimacy so that it could be a bona fide program within the school and they are given a Quebec recognized certificate, I think that would make a big difference".

Why they keep going

Somewhat surprisingly none of the students mentioned they were going to drop out because they were not going to get a diploma. This would not be an unreasonable reaction in light of the absence of credits for IPL courses, yet the students appeared both to know and accept the social importance of school. Furthermore, one student even espoused education as his right, "I guess everybody's entitled to an education, right?...I have a couple of friends that I know will never get a diploma but hey, the more stuff they get, the more experience and things they learn in school I guess the better they will be when they get on their own". This conviction and desire for education and especially the diploma extended even further for a couple of students who said they would spend more time at school in order to get their diploma. One student, for instance, said: "Yeah, I would, the diploma, get us to do like enriched stuff, like I'd even do another year here and get my diploma afterwards, like they should, I don't know, maybe start us differently or something, I'm sure they could of changed the program a little bit so it would make us finish and get our diplomas the same time as everybody else". This is especially remarkable coming from a student who has seen very little academic success and, as an IPL student, has a very low social status in the school culture.

While the students were not responding to the absence of credits and a potential diploma by leaving the program and school (as might be expected), many of them also realize the limitations

of IPL as a work preparation program. When students were asked about their impressions of the work program, their work experiences and the usefulness of the work program, many mentioned that the references they gained would be helpful but in general the work experiences would not be enough to get a job. Once again students pointed to the diploma as an essential element in finding a job. Thus, one student stressed, "You gotta finish high school, you gotta have a diploma to get into, to get a job", while another concluded, "I don't find that it [work experience] does any better because it's just working and you do need a high school leaving before you can get a job, and only references, I don't find that it's good". A third student said, "It [Attestation of Skills] might help in some jobs, but most of them needs a real diploma, in most jobs". When she was asked if the work study program would help her in getting a job, Julie, an IPL2 student, referred to her own work experiences: "I worked as a secretary, there's no way you're going to get a job as a secretary. Then I worked with kids at school, and there's no way you're going to work with that. At Tyler's Bakery--you might get a job there, that's about it". Although she could see that her work experiences were unlikely to be a source of future jobs, and she was not integrated in any regular courses and thus not receiving credit for her work, this student nonetheless remained in school, in her second year of IPL and showed good attendance and work habits.

The continued involvement of students in IPL is all the more remarkable when they are gaining so little. It is particularly interesting in the case of students who realize the limitations of the program and voice them, yet still do not drop out but remain at school for other reasons. These reasons were only once directly expressed as their "right to education", yet the same rationale comes through in classroom observations and the students' voices, in the school's rhetoric about the value of IPL, and--indeed--in what are experienced as society's expectations. Despite the difficulties and the problems students and teachers see with the program, students were nonetheless subscribing to the rationale that school is important, and that it outweighed any other option open to them. Students continued to support the value of school if only by attendance, while many aspects of the school environment encouraged neither their involvement nor their withdrawal.

Problems created for the running of classes as a result

Overall, the IPL classroom experience is one of marginality. The teacher's experience is one where, faced with so many demands, priority must be given to behaviour and control rather than to academics. For the students, many see IPL as a waste of time and put as little effort as possible into school. For the IPL teacher, educational success is not expected of her students and her efforts are supported neither by the students nor other teachers. This marginal status affects the classroom environment and the position of the IPL program in the school culture.

The IPL classroom environment fluctuated between disruption and control, and the "participation structures" (Page, 1991)--similar to other lower-track classrooms--tended to be un-clear, fluctuating among the teacher interacting with all of the students, interacting with a small group of the students, working with an individual and individual student seat work. For example, during an English class, students were to read quietly or work at their desks but, at the same time, the teacher "visited" several individuals and in a normal speaking voice asked them for assignments. Similarly, within a Life Skills course, students were asked to work individually at their desks while an oral re-test was given to 3 or 4 students at the front of the room. The varying participation structures created interruptions and encouraged impatience, short attention spans, talking and general "goofing off"--an environment where discipline and control came to be a central concern for the teacher.

Despite the minimal effort required of students within the classroom, the amount of effort and enthusiasm IPL students brought to class varied enormously. A few students conscientiously handed assignments in on time, and were always up to date on assignments and exercises. A few others, because they "goof off" or were frequently absent, were often several assignments behind the rest of the class. The majority of students in IPL, however, fell in between these two groups. They got exercises and assignments done, but not always on time. They also tended to put little effort into school and were generally

complacent about school and classroom events and activities. Students commented that they "didn't really care about how well done an exercise was" or whether an assignment would be finished or not. In computer class for example, one student said after losing all of the work she had done in class because she didn't save it, "Well, it's already gone, I'm quitting school anyways". Their lack of interest also showed through when, often, all but one or two students had closed up their books and sat talking 15 minutes before the end of a 50 minute class. The extent of teacher control in these situations was very limited. She was usually unsuccessful at forcing students to work until the end of the class, and when students were seemingly apathetic about marks (justifiably since grades are not going towards a diploma), her leverage of granting or withholding marks was minimal. With students realizing that, virtually regardless of what they did or did not hand in, they would be "pushed" through the program, it is not surprising that class time was filled with disruptions from students who had little inclination to participate in anything but the minimum requirements.

The IPL program at Eastman Regional High School generated a cycle of low expectations and minimal involvement. The students felt stigmatized by their involvement in IPL, wanted to leave the program but could not and felt they were wasting their time in a program that would not get them a diploma at the end. They consequently put little effort into school and had little involvement in the wider school culture. This reaction served to reinforce and justify the low expectations teachers and

principals held for IPL students and encouraged the low standards for success set for IPL students. The cycle continued with student apathy when they had to do very little to move through the "system", and faculty expected even less from the students within the program.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

The IPL program as designed by the Ministry of Education is for students who are unable to keep up in the regular track because of learning and/or behavioral problems. These students are also past the legal age for high school leaving or are in their last academic year, and they have failed at least one year of English and mathematics. It is thus the lowest track for high school students who are, or will soon be, of legal school leaving age. It, in theory, allows students to work toward their diploma or at least to obtain the grade ten requirements to enter a technical diploma program at a slower, more individualized pace. It also attempts to ease the transition into the work force by teaching job skills and providing references and it encourages this transition to occur as quickly as possible.

This case study suggests however that, in practice, IPL is a program for students who WON'T leave school even though they have not done well and won't graduate by the cut off age of 18 or obtain the requirements to enter a diploma program. The school therefore has students who are, or are very near, school leaving age and who are failing and very unlikely to obtain a high school diploma outside of the Adult Education sector, and these students are refusing to drop out of school. The school is required to serve these students until they are eighteen years of age and cannot expel them unless there are serious discipline problems.

The IPL program gives the school something to "do" with these students. Through uncredited general education and jobs skills courses and work periods, the students are occupied in seemingly "scholastic" tasks. Its limitations however are outlined by Sarah Parrish who describes the school's relation to the School Board and ultimately the Ministry of Education as follows: "I really think that the Board looks at it as, 'Ok, these kids are going out to work because they can't do regular stream, we have to keep them here, so we have to provide for them you-deal-with-it kind of thing'. So the fact that we've come up with this paper (Attestation of Skills) at the end of the IPL year is to build their confidence because they don't leave with a high school leaving". Although the school has a little less leeway than this statement suggests (they must provide the Attestation "paper" under the Ministry of Education guidelines), this feeling that "we have to keep them here" provides a very good summary of why the IPL program was really designed and implemented. These students are the ones nobody knows what to do with, and under the guise of 'work preparation', IPL is a scholastic program which actually provides a very limited work and academic preparation for the students involved.

The program is set up very much like an academic school program. It is designed to fit the school regulations and meet school criteria. The IPL program essentially is trying to make school more like work for these students (through the work experience periods) while making their work programs very much like school with grades, assignments and marks for attendance.

Similarly the daily journals of their hours worked, responsibilities and feelings about the job that students must keep during their work-period makes the work experience more like a school course than a true experience of what a job is like. There are also ways that the program focuses more on school requirements and regulations than it does on the needs of the students. A student who finds a 3 month job during which he cannot be "visited" by the teacher or coordinator, for instance, is told he may not return to school when the job has ended. While the bureaucratic difficulties are understandable, this student's situation seems to be ideal in a program that is intended to enable students to find full-time work and give them valuable work experience and references.

While the structure of IPL is very much like school in many ways, it is unlike school in that for almost all courses it does not award credits towards graduation and it actually impedes students' progress (where possible) towards graduation by taking time away from credited courses. This leaves students in a school program that 1)is not serving their individual academic needs most of the time 2)is not providing them with school credentials or is taking time away from credited work and 3) is not providing them with adequate skills or experience to enable them to compete for anything but low-paying, low-status, dead-end jobs.

Paradoxically most of the students in IPL stay in school after they are legally able to leave despite the difficulties they face. They remain in school because they want to graduate or at least work towards that goal even if it means continuing on in Adult Education once they reach 18 years of age. Despite their academic problems they continue to subscribe to the importance of education which is fostered both socially and by the IPL program, even though at the end of the program they are still statistically considered dropouts since they do not receive a high school leaving certificate or a diploma. For the students, IPL's main purpose is not as a transition to work, it is the way, the only way left, for them to continue their education and stay in school. They are very clear that they want and need a diploma and although IPL has obvious shortcomings in this area it is their only option towards graduating.

The issue of credits or the lack thereof is of great concern for students in terms of their not receiving a diploma. However it seems to be less obvious to the faculty in the sense that they view IPL as preparing students for work where credits are of no significance. Credits are seen by the teachers and principals in terms of their self-esteem benefits for students and making students "feel like other students ". The lack of credits played a key role however in creating a difficult classroom situation. Without credits, the IPL program is not taken seriously by the students or the rest of the school. Students are generally apathetic, the teacher has little leverage without marks to motivate the students, and the classroom consequently is often

unproductive and on the verge of chaos. Yet this is understood as a failing related to the shortcomings of IPL students, rather than as a logical consequence of structural flaws in the IPL program itself--namely, its failure to provide academic credit.

Aside from the problems of not being a diploma program, the IPL program offers very few concrete, certifiable skills to its students. Except for those students who are behaviourally and academically able to be integrated into a regular stream course, the IPL program is providing students at Eastman Regional High School only a minimal amount of basic education. IPL students are being taught rudimentary life and work skills, they are getting limited working experience, and students who are very weak are not receiving enough remedial help to be competent in the basics while students who are academically able are not receiving the help needed to allow them to graduate. The job skills that students learn, such as filling out application forms, are relevant for an employment search, but basic reading and math skills are also important and a high school diploma often will prove more significant. The emphasis on work skills and experience appears to be misplaced when the IPL students themselves are the first to observe that what is most needed for the world of work is a high school diploma.

The problems of the program's structure are further emphasized for students in terms of the stigma associated with IPL. They are characterized as the "bozos" and the students least likely to go anywhere and to a certain extent they

internalize the stereotypes. In spite of the difficulties they see with the program, they nonetheless place the blame on themselves for their problems in school. Termed "legitimation of inequality" by Bowles and Gintis, Oakes applies this theory to the lower-track student's experience as follows: "The form and content of schooling practices used to organize instruction--such as curriculum tracking and ability grouping--play a major role in enabling students to internalize failure resulting from the stratification process as an individual rather than a social or structural problem" (Oakes 1985:145). The blame IPL students placed on themselves, not the school, was clear. Furthermore, despite their negative experiences, the students unquestioningly accepted the importance of education, as did the students in Oakes' study. Along the same lines mentioned by Oakes, and Bowles and Gintis, the IPL students accepted their involvement in IPL and their differences from other students as legitimate.

What is perhaps the most surprising characteristic of the IPL program however, is the commitment it has from both the students and the teachers. For the most part the teachers and especially the students take the IPL program seriously and are trying hard to make the program work. Although the students recognize the failures of the program they still very strongly believe that they need a high school diploma and that education is their right.

The students in IPL have indicated, if only by not dropping out, that they want to be in school, but most of all that they want to get a diploma. The regular stream and the IPL program are not allowing them to do so. There are however other options that would enable them to at least work towards that goal. For instance, acquiring funding or using the money for the IPL program for tutors or teacher aids to work one on one with students who need the extra help to catch up or to learn the basic skills of reading, writing, math etc. Or, allowing students to spend more time on areas they have difficulty in by giving them a lighter course load, or by spreading the high school requirements out over six instead of five years. Any alternative that would allow "less academic" students to progress towards their diploma within the high school setting of their peers but at a slower pace would be preferable. Job and life skills such as how to write up a resumé or what is involved in a rental agreement could still be taught with credit, but not at the expense of the required courses needed for graduation. Furthermore, a community out-reach program might be set up where businesses and organizations would have a stronger tie to the school and offer references, part-time or summer employment to students. In short, alternatives could be developed so that students who are "academically weak" for whatever reason, and who want to be in school, could work towards their diploma, and students who are not academically able or who do not wish to work towards a diploma are given as much of the basics (and perhaps enough of a basis to acquire technical training if they wish) while they are still legally required to be in school, and have

some basic job skills and employment contacts if they want to go out and work.

There will be difficulties with these alternatives as there are with all programs, but by looking at what students want, the needs of both schools and students are more likely to be met. Students would be getting out of school as much as they were able to and experiencing less of the feeling that they were wasting their time. And, schools would have fewer difficulties with students who are ostracized by their peers for being in a program without credits. The school might also benefit by having fewer dropouts in its statistics since more students would be receiving diplomas. Taking into account the realities of the job market students are facing, and their own understanding that a diploma is a minimal requirement for anything but the most menial jobs, any option that will move "at risk" students towards high school leaving or a technical training program would be beneficial. Although education may not be "a right" as one student put it, while students are legally required or are able to attend public high school, resources should be geared to allow them to benefit as much as possible from their time within the classroom.

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