

**Looking at high school dropout problems from students' perspectives:
Finding a solution**

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ABSTRACT

Should we be concerned about the more than 30 percent national dropout rate? Can anything be done to intervene successfully? Many students who drop out of school have the intellectual ability to complete college (Howard and Anderson, 1978). If this is so, then our educational institutions are failing them and doing them a tremendous disservice (Committee of Canadian Council for Exceptional Children, 1992).

This research investigates the high school dropout phenomenon in Quebec through the “eyes” of potential dropouts. The project examines the high school dropout phenomenon from the perspective of students who are at risk of leaving school prematurely. The objectives of the research are to investigate how potential high school dropouts perceive success, and to find out what program reforms these students believe are necessary to keep them in school. In the data analysis the students’ schooling experiences are critically examined, and factors such as students’ perception of public high schools, social affairs schools, teachers and their view of success are considered. These considerations are made within the conceptual framework of a variety of sociological theories in education. Social Affairs schools are special schools reserved for youths who are wards of the court, and those who are in the care of Youth Protection because they cannot live at home.

This study provides richly descriptive narrative accounts of the students’ experiences, thoughts and feelings. The study gives voice to high school students who are at risk of dropping out, and of their views of what their needs are to be successful in school. Data collected from this study can be used to develop suitable

programs for students. The study concludes by signaling a call to parents, teachers, governments, policy-makers, and caregivers to listen to children and to involve them in matters that are important to them – such as their views of how they can achieve school success.

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RÉSUMÉ

Est-ce que nous devrions nous préoccuper du plus que 30% taux de décrochage national? Est-ce que n'importe quoi peut être fait pour intervenir avec succès? Beaucoup d'étudiants qui abandonnent l'école ont la capacité intellectuelle pour compléter le collège (Howard et Anderson, 1978). Si ceci est si, alors nos institutions éducatives les échoués et leur ont fait un service épouvantable (Conseil Canadien pour les Enfants Exceptionnels, 1992).

Cette recherche examine le phénomène d'abandon d'école dans le Québec par le "les yeux" des abandonnés potentiels. Le projet examine le décrochage phénomène en école secondaire selon la perspective d'étudiants qui sont au risque de partir d'école prématurément. Les objectifs de la recherche devraient investiguer comment l'école secondaire perçoit succès, et comment découvrir la réforme des programmes ces étudiants croit sont nécessaire garder les dans école. Dans l'analyse des données les expériences scolaires des étudiants sont examinées d'une manière critique, et facteurs tel perception des écoles secondaires publiques, les écoles d'affaires social, les enseignants et leur vue de succès sont considérés. Ces considérations sont faites dans la structure conceptuelle d'un assortiment des théories sociologiques dans l'éducation. Les écoles d'affaires sociales sont des écoles spéciales réservées pour les jeunes sous tutelle judiciaire, et ceux-là qui sont dans le soin de la Protection de Jeunesse parce qu'ils ne peuvent pas habiter à domicile.

Cette étude fournit les comptes de récit richement descriptif des expériences étudiants, de leurs pensées ainsi que leurs sentiments. L'étude donne la voix aux étudiants secondaires qui sont à risque de tomber hors, et de leurs vues de ce que leur besoin devraient réussir à l'école. Les données recueillies de cette étude peuvent être utilisées pour développer des programmes convenables pour les étudiants. L'étude conclut en signalant un appel aux parents, aux enseignants, aux gouvernements, aux élaborateurs de protocoles, et les soignants à écouter les enfants et les impliquer dans des questions qui sont importantes à les – tel que leurs vues du moyen d'achever l'école en succès.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I was inspired to work on this project because of my previous experience with students in a social affairs school. Most of the students who attend social affairs schools are at risk of dropping out of high school so I undertook this study to give them an opportunity to voice their opinions about their needs for achieving successful school experiences. As such, this study required complete candor in describing the needs of these students and how schools address their needs. Consequently, I am deeply indebted to Batshaw Youth and Family Centres and the school boards for granting me the opportunity to examine this issue in their schools.

But none of this would have been possible without the help and support of many people. As such, I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincerest gratitude to everyone who was involved in this study. Several professors were instrumental in helping me to complete this thesis by offering support, advice and encouragement. I recognize Prof. Jing Lin who was my supervisor when I began this study and later became my co-supervisor. I thank her heartily for all her patience, guidance and support even after she left the employ of McGill. I learned a lot from her while I worked on this project as she instilled in me the scholarly skills necessary to write this dissertation. She certainly is a wonderful teacher!

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Finally, many professionals gave of their time and support to this project and I certainly could not have completed it without their help. I must thank everyone who participated in the study- the principals, teachers, social workers, unit managers and child care workers. They all took time out of their busy schedule to accommodate me. They allowed me time for interviews in which they responded forthrightly and honestly to my many questions. Their views were quite insightful and useful. A special thank you goes to the students who were respondents in this research. Many agreed to participate in the study because they wanted to be heard and because they wanted to help others who would follow them. Their patience and cooperation during the time we spent together were exemplary. The time and effort they each put into answering the questions during the interviewing process were remarkable. Their entire input and involvement have been greatly appreciated. Thank you once again and good luck in your search for school success!

Thank you all, it's been a wonderful experience for me!

INTRODUCTION

Many Canadians are very proud to learn that our country has been voted as the best place on this planet to live (United Nations Development Programs, 1992). Our Prime Minister, in his speeches, does not hesitate to remind everyone in this country and outside its walls about this factor at every opportunity that he gets. With our low birthrate (second only to Japan), low infant mortality rate - 6.1 to every 1000 live births (Statistics Canada, 1995), and long life expectancy - average 78 years life expectancy (Statistics Canada, 1993), overall Canadians do enjoy a high quality of life (World Bank, 1992). Our country is one of the most affluent in the world, and as such is able to provide open access to primary and secondary education for all its youth. All this accomplishment has taken place in Canada's relatively short existence of 135 years as a country (on July 1, 2002 Canada celebrated its 135th birthday).

However, with all its high achievements as a fairly young country, Canada has been experiencing a serious problem for some time now. It has not been able to effectively deal with the problem of the high rate of high school dropouts (Anderson, 1991; Conference Board of Canada, 1992; Cadieux, 1991; Employment and Immigration Canada, 1990). Over 30 percent of Canadian students enrolled in Grade Nine leave school prematurely (Anderson, 1991; Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1990) without a high school certificate. The high school dropout phenomenon has plagued Canada for the last fifty years (Gilbert and McRobert, 1977). Since the middle of the last century, Canadian schools have experienced a dropout rate of more than 30 percent of its student population each year

(Conference Board of Canada, 1999; Levin, 1990). On this issue, Frank McKenna (1996) – then premier of New Brunswick - joined in the debate and registered his disgust as he stated that, “the school system in our province and across Canada in this issue is little short of a national disgrace” (cited in *Literacy Matters*: 4).

As such, the problem of high school dropouts has generated a great deal of commentary both within and outside of the academy. This commentary tends to highlight a variety of “costs” to both the individual who drops out and the society into which he or she “drops.” In the following chapter, I summarize a variety of alleged “costs” of dropping out of high school.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND TO THE DROPOUT PROBLEM IN CONTEMPORARY CANADA

1.1 THE VARIED COSTS OF DROPPING OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL

As we move further into the twenty-first century, the high rate of school dropouts warrants serious attention for many reasons – one of which is the alleged cost both to the dropouts and to society. This chapter examines a variety of these alleged costs. One widely mentioned cost is that of illiteracy. For the high school dropout in contemporary Canada, the possibility of becoming an illiterate adult is alarmingly high.

1.1.2 Literacy

Citizens in contemporary Canada are likely to require a fairly high level of literacy in order to work and live comfortably. Furthermore, those who drop out of school prior to completing their high school certification are far more vulnerable - socially, politically and economically than those who remain in school. As LeCompte says:

When most people don't need to go to school at all, either because they can survive economically without being literate, because literacy can be acquired without going to school, or because there is no pressing or ecclesiastical body of knowledge that people should be compelled to master, then the percentage of population that fails to acquire a terminal degree from a school is not critical. However, in a society that requires literacy for economic well-being, and that postulates that literacy is acquired in a formal governmentally supervised or sanctioned school, it becomes critical that as large a portion of the population as is possible attend and complete the required course of studies. (1987: 24)

Literacy can be defined both narrowly or more expansively. First, consider a narrow definition which focuses on “a person’s ability to understand and use printed information in daily activities at work, home and in the community in order to reach personal goals and develop individual potential” (Calamai, 1999:2).

Second, consider that literacy can be defined more broadly, since it needs not be confined merely to the sense in which it refers to an individual’s competence in reading and writing. Nowadays, we commonly hear references to literacy in a wide range of human activities as “computer literacy,” “moral literacy,” “cultural literacy,” “technological literacy,” or “media literacy,” etc. For example, Brown defines media literacy as the ability to “access, analyze, evaluate and produce communications in a diversity of forms” (2002: 1). Thus, a wider definition of literacy refers to the connection that exists between “literacy” and the ability to learn and function in a broad range of social, political and economic capacities. Illiteracy, in this wider sense, means that an individual has limited ability to problem solve, cope with mathematical tasks, participate in the civic and political life of one’s society.

It is said that fewer than one in five Canadians has the top-level skills needed to decipher a dense trade report that is intended for the general public (Calamai, 1999). Clearly, those who lack such skills are in an especially weak position when it comes to influencing the conditions and circumstances of social, political and economic life. Citizens who are “illiterate” in the wider sense are profoundly disadvantaged. It would be naïve to suppose that erasing the dropout problem would guarantee that everyone would acquire these skills in school. Nevertheless,

it is also true that schools offer the best hope for most children to acquire such skills, and that hopes are dashed for many children when they drop out. In short, therefore, addressing the problem of high school dropouts is one important way of addressing the problem of “literacy” in both its narrow and wide meanings.

1.1.3 Employability

Another factor that militates against high school dropouts is the limitation placed on their employability. Newell (1999) reported that a large percentage of applicants for job at his Fort McMurray company were unemployable. Most of the applicants were high school dropouts who had difficulty understanding the written part of the company’s job application test at the Grade Ten level. In the Speech from the Throne (2001), the Canadian Government acknowledged that many of its citizens lack the needed skills to work in this new economy. The emphasis placed on this economy is a knowledge-based one. “To succeed in the knowledge economy, Canada will need people with advanced skills and entrepreneurial spirit” (Speech from the Throne, 2001:3). Education plays an integral part in the labour market, and the economy of this country. In this case, anyone with less than a high school certificate is the most vulnerable to be unemployed (Doré, 1997; Cobb, 1998; Canadian Market and Productivity, 1989).

In keeping with the global economic trend, Canada’s demand for labour has shifted away from unskilled and semi-skilled jobs towards highly skilled and professional jobs (Royal Bank Letter, 1995; Bryan, 1998). The Montreal Board of Trade President, Paule Doré (1997) suggested that unschooled workers are a drain

on the economy as the unemployment rate among adults who have dropped out of high school is 90 percent. The Royal Bank Letter stated that:

No longer could most people expect to adapt to the changing demands at work through a combination of native intelligence and coaching. They have to be able to understand written manuals, absorb classroom instructions, and respond to computer prompts. High school dropouts – and even high school graduates who did not go to college or university - increasingly found themselves cut out of action. Even though they had the ability to learn, employers were taking no chances. As more and more systems were introduced to increase productivity, companies raised their hiring standards. The result is that today, people without a high school diploma or college certificate literally need not apply for a wide range of “entry-level” jobs. (1995: 2)

Similar concerns were echoed in a 1998 report by Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce. In this report, the bank’s economist Benny Tal stated that “young people are facing problems that their parents never faced. You really need skills and if you don’t acquire them, you will be left behind” (1998: 10).

Of course there are a number of jobs in the service industry which require very little skill, such as waiting on tables or making deliveries, but these are very low paying jobs (Beck and Muia, 1980; Statistics Canada, 1991). Most of Canada’s high school dropouts have no choice but to take these jobs (Royal Bank Letter, 1995). But not even these jobs are readily available to the high school dropouts. Employers would much prefer to have students working part-time than to hire high school dropouts. Beck and Muia (1980) express the notion that there is a belief among employers which suggest that students who dropped out of school make undesirable employees. Lichtenstein (1989), in his study describing the relationship between people with specific disabilities and dropouts, revealed that dropouts were less likely to be employed whether they were disabled or not (Pp. 501 – 513).

1.1.4 Social costs

Some commentators emphasize the social costs as a result of the soaring high school dropout rates. For example, Levin (1972) identified six social consequences of inadequate education, which he relates to the failure of high school completion:

- ◆ Foregone national income;
- ◆ Foregone tax revenues for the support of government services;
- ◆ Increased demand for social services;
- ◆ Increased crime;
- ◆ Reduced political participation;
- ◆ Reduce intergenerational mobility, and poorer levels of health (p. 10).

Although the above observations were made over thirty years ago, they still hold true now. Reporting on a study prepared by the Conference Board of Canada, *The Gazette, Montreal*, in a May 1992 issue, stated that a single year crop of high school dropouts will cost the government of Canada more than 4 billion dollars over their life time. Not only will they earn less and pay less tax but, also, they will be less productive and add to the cost of unemployment, welfare, health and policing. The report suggested that over the previous decade the dropout rate ranged between 28 percent and 38 percent. It also stated that if the dropout rate were to be cut by 10 percent by the year 2000, the savings would have reached 26 billion dollars. This is almost half the amount of money Canada now spends on education (Statistics Canada, 1999). Quoting from the report, the article in *The Gazette, Montreal* stated that, "Canada simply cannot sustain a continued national dropout rate around 30 percent. It will have a staggering impact on our economic

future” (p. 6). The use of technology continues to increase, and the high dropout rate remains problematic. Of course, we are now in the year 2003 and the goal that was set for reducing the drop out rate in 1997 and the year 2000 has not yet been achieved.

1.1.5 Costs to the meaning of individual lives

A number of scholars have pointed to the personal costs of dropping out of high school (Dei et al., 1997; Wilson, 1991). It lowers one’s self-esteem, because in our society dropping out of high school is perceived as a personal failure (Dei et al., 1997). The negative impact of dropping out of high school has on the individual can be most costly in terms of self-worth. Some students get depressed because of repeated failure before they drop out (Eggert et al., 1999). Some may even commit suicide because of low self-esteem and depression (Kessler, et al., 1995). Dr. Bedwani (2001) sounded the alarm regarding the increase in the suicide rate of Quebec’s teens. Bedwani’s (2001) research revealed that at 20.7 per 100 000, Quebec has the highest rate of teenage suicide in the country. He expressed the notion that, “If a young person has a drug abuse problem, is depressed and has a history of behavioural problems, he is more at risk of suicide than someone who is simply depressed” (cited in *The Gazette, Montreal*, Oct. 13, 2001:A 3).

Besides the effects on students’ self-esteem when they drop out of school, another factor that potentially assails dropouts is that of undeveloped interests. The connection I have in mind, between the problem of dropping out of high school, on the one hand, and the development of interest, on the other, is not explicitly drawn

in the literature. The connection is no less important for that, but it requires further explanation. Callan (1996) has emphasized the crucial significance of recognizing and developing children's interests in school. Even more importantly, he advocates that children's interests should be included in the school curriculum. In Callan's view then, a person without any deep and absorbing interest is, in fact, a person whose life lacks meaning. Someone whose interests have not been sufficiently developed, therefore, is someone whose sense of self is to that extent deeply impoverished. The scientist who dutifully does his/her work each day because it pays the bills, but lacks any interest whatsoever in science as an activity or body of knowledge, might be an example. I take it that any suitable inspiring conception of schooling should view the failure of students to develop interests as a failure of schools. Indeed, since the failure impacts so crucially with the meaningfulness of one's life, it is a moral failure.

Of course, one might object to this example, and might argue that the completion of a high school certification program hardly guarantees that children will develop interests and thereby lead meaningful lives. Indeed, Callan's main concern is for children who fail to develop interests in spite of the fact that they have finished their school at the secondary level, because the schooling they received has routinely ignored the importance of recognizing and fostering children's interests. Nevertheless, this objection does not undermine a concern for the problem of school dropouts. On the contrary, it reinforces the crucial point that studying the high school dropout problem must take into account the perspectives and interests of the students themselves. The task of reducing the high school

dropout rates is not one of merely ensuring that students stay in school no matter what, but also ensuring that schools become better – more meaningful, more interesting – places for children to stay and learn.

In this study, I listened to students who are at risk of dropping out of high school and they articulated their likes and dislikes about school and what their needs are to help them succeed in school. As I stress in the next section, the voices and perspectives of students are often carelessly ignored, dismissed or misunderstood in schools. This is one of the reasons my research on dropouts focuses heavily on the perspectives and voices of the students themselves. As such, each student participant is allowed to tell his/her story directly as part of the analysis of this research.

1.2 RATIONALE FOR THE RESEARCH IN THIS STUDY

As a teacher who has taught students with special needs for many years, it is my view that the needs of students at risk of dropping out of high school should be examined from their point of view. In the typical public school classroom today, there are students from different homes, different cultures, different beliefs and values. There are students in the classroom whose first language is neither French nor English. In a classroom one can find many children from homes in which both parents work outside the home. In the same classroom some students have single parents, while there are others who have half siblings or temporary siblings unrelated by blood. Some students live in foster homes, residential centres or group homes, while others have no parents at all (Noddings, 1992; Dryden, 1995;

Ghosh, 1996). Consequently, students arrive at school with a wide variety of lived experiences and it is from these experiences that they interpret and understand the world. One's lived experiences are vital to one's understanding of the world. Eisner (1993) suggests that experience is the base on which meaning is constructed, and "experience in significant degree depends on our ability to get in touch with the qualitative world we inhabit" (p. 5).

If the students are not listened to in school, their interpretations and how they understand assignments may be misunderstood. Needless to say that such misunderstandings of students' interpretation can have negative impact on their opportunity to succeed in school. Their views, values, culture and abilities all impact on the work they do in school (Ghosh, 1996; Dei et. al, 1997). These are factors that either enhance or militate against students' success in school. For the most part, students who have not learned at home the values, culture and abilities of the dominant society end up being at risk of dropping out (Deyhle and Swisher, 1997; Wilson, 1991), because in many cases they do not understand what is required of them. For example, McLaren states that "the education system gives those who begin with certain advantages (the right economic status and thus the right values, the right speech patterns, the right mannerisms, the right behavior) a better chance to retain those advantages all through school, and ensures that minority and economically disadvantaged children will remain at the bottom of the meritocratic ladder" (1994: 221). In my view, these are the students who need to be heard if they are to be successful in school.

In this project I chose to listen to some students who are at risk of dropping out of high school, thereby giving them a “voice” to tell their story and to hear their views of how they can be successful in school. McElroy-Johnson expresses the notion that every person has a different voice (1993). The Canadian school system serves a varied and diverse population, with different views of education and different voices. Robin Barrow (1981) suggests that education can be and is something different for different people. As such, individual experiences and views of success may differ from one person to the next. However, the different interpretations that exist in schools appear to be ignored consistently (Dei et. al, 1997). For the most part, students’ experiences and interpretation of meanings are not considered during periods of teaching and assessment (McLaren, 1994, McElroy-Johnson, 1993). Unfortunately, schools that treat students’ views, experiences and interests as marginal or insignificant, fail to do their part in enabling students to be successful in school – and by extension live a meaningful life.

Another factor that should be given keen consideration in schools is that students at risk of dropping out are pre-identified because they show signs of mal-content and dissatisfaction with their school experiences (Jimerson et al., 2000). It is no secret at this time that dissatisfaction in school is one of the primary factors that lead at-risk students to school disengagement and finally to dropping out (Levin, 1990; Government of Canada Minister of State for Youth, 1990; Cregheur and Devereaux, 1991). Although these students are usually pre-identified as having the potential to leave school prematurely, rarely are their voices heard in school. Some

students in this study suggest that they are not involved in their learning, hence rarely are their needs in school satisfied. If all students are to be genuinely included in Canadian public schools, it is imperative that the lived experiences they take to school be validated and built upon (Dei et. al, 1997).

1.3 RESEARCH FOCUS

This research focuses on the students' construction of meaning on school success. Another of my foci in this research is to concentrate on using different theories to analyze the students' perspectives on various school-related factors, such as their favourite courses and how they think of their learning in school. The direction of my investigation centers on program reforms that students at risk of dropping out of high school believe are necessary to keep them in school. In this research emphasis is placed on a micro-level qualitative analysis of students' stories, while it is set within the framework of a combination of sociological theories in education. The population is drawn from three English social affairs schools in Quebec. The students in these schools are found to have a high probability of leaving school at the secondary level prematurely (Barwick, 1992; Ministère de l'Éducation, 1991).

If more students are to experience school success, then provision must be made for a more flexible curriculum to accommodate those who do not fit into the present monolithic structure (Greene, 1988). Students should have a voice in articulating their view of success, and their needs for achieving success. Gary Phillips (1992), in his prescription for self-directed learning for at-risk students,

emphasized the importance of having ownership of one's learning. Freire (1970) and Gramsci (1971) have also expressed the notion that ownership of one's learning is crucial for each individual. On this issue Phillips (1992) writes:

For emotions are essential to retaining and recalling information and experiences for future use. The danger lies now in who determines success. The 'other'? If the 'other' says we've failed, have we failed? When we aren't involved in the learning process, we have fewer ways of turning mediocrity or failure into excellence, or one of the most important components of being the best we can be. (p. 51)

In spite of the numerous Canadian studies that have been done (Tanner, Krahn and Hartnagel, 1995; Gaskell and Kelly, 1996; Cummins 1989b; Natriello, McDill, and Pallas, 1985; Cheng et al. 1989; MacKay and Myles, 1989, 1995; and Lawton et al. 1988, among others), efforts made to combat the high school dropout problem over the decades have been unsuccessful. The high school dropout problem continues to have a hold on Canadian schools. For example, expansion reforms were made to accommodate accessibility of all students, while subject promotion, and streaming were other measures put in place over the years to assist with the reduction of high school dropout rate (Henchey and Burgess, 1987). But absent from these reforms are any indications that the measures of adjustments included recommendations from students as to what their needs are for school success. For, "our personal and collective journeys reflect and influence how we interpret the world around us" (Dei, et al., 1997: 5). To date, schools are continuing their long search for success in combating the high school dropout phenomenon. They are still trying to find suitable programs and methods that will assist them in reducing the rate of students dropping out of high school, if not eliminating the problem.

Presently, it appears that we are still no closer to finding a formula for success. Could it be that one of the major problems is that the Ministry of Education is trying too hard to find one single prescription to suit the wide and diverse population of the public school system? Could it be that some students who dropout of high school define success differently from that of the school? Could it be that the students' voices are not heard and their experiences are discounted in the planning of their programs?

The study is based on the assumption that high school dropout will continue to be a major problem in Canadian schools unless high school students are allowed to be actively involved in the planning and developmental processes of their school program. The involvement of their lived experience is necessary for them to be connected to school. Maxine Greene (1988) writes:

Rather than posing dilemmas to students or presenting models of expertise, the caring teacher tries to look through students' eyes, to struggle with them as subjects in search of their own projects, their own ways of making sense of the world. Reflectiveness, even logical thinking remains important; but the point of cognitive development is not to gain an increasingly complete grasp of abstract principles. It is to interpret from many vantage points as possible the lived experiences; the ways there are of being in the world. (p. 120)

The present Quebec Curriculum Reform, which is in its final phase of implementation (2002-2003), suggests that at the completion of a high school program, students who are successful should be able "to feel at ease in this society. Therefore, students should master more knowledge and be able to assimilate new knowledge on an ongoing basis" (1997: 14). Since this *is* crucial to measuring school success, I believe that every student should be given the opportunity in school to succeed at this level. Canadian society demands no less from our

schools. It is worth repeating here that this is one of the reasons my research on the topic of high school dropouts focuses heavily on the perspectives and voices of the students themselves.

At this juncture, I will turn my attention to the review of the literature on high school dropout in the following chapter. The chapter contains three distinct but related parts. All the parts are connected by threads that do not merely identify who drops out, but also answer the question why some students are engaged in school while others are disengaged and eventually drop out. The first section deals with government research and other studies that neglect students' voices altogether. The second part summarizes academic sociological studies that deal mainly with the role of social class in reproducing inequalities, including the dropout problem. While the third part deals with theoretical approaches that address the role of factors besides social class (race, gender, disability, culture, poverty, etc.) that relate to the problem of high school dropout.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW: SOME THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO SCHOOL DROPOUTS

The purpose of this chapter is to review and discuss selected research on the high school dropout phenomenon and students who are at risk of leaving school prematurely. The aim of the discussions in this chapter is twofold. First, part one shows that many studies overlook the voices of students in addressing the problem of dropouts. Second, parts two and three examine sociological studies that demonstrate why including children's voices in the study of dropouts is crucial, but which do not themselves undertake such a study, at least not in much depth.

2.1 Studies that overlook students' voices

From a historical perspective, the issue of high school dropouts has been of grave concern in Canada since the 1950s (Dodds, 1993) when Neatby's (1953) indictment of Canadian education brought this problem to the attention of the general public. In 1977 Gilbert and McRoberts complained that the retention rate of high school students was consistently lower than that of the United States. A 1961 Statistics Canada report revealed that 35 percent of all Canadian students dropped out of school before they completed the Grade 8 program. Since then, the issue has generated a great deal of interest among education scholars in North America (Rumberger, 1987; Dei et al., 1997).

The number of studies on this topic is demonstrated by several reviews compiled mostly in the last part of the twentieth century. For example, 775

citations (1970 – 2001) are listed in an ERIC database. The Department of Human Resources Development Canada (1994) catalogued a bibliography entitled *Taking action on the dropout issue*. In this catalogue, there are more than 400 articles and resource materials on the dropout issue listed. A bibliography of articles in 200 journals (1990's – 2001) was compiled by Database Psych INFO Record, and over 400 entries are listed in the Library Catalog on the topic. Most of the studies listed were conducted in the United States. For example, in the ERIC database with 775 citations, only 24 research projects were conducted outside of the United States. One each was done in Australia, England, Jamaica and South Africa, while 20 were conducted in Canada.

Despite the abundance of research that exists on the topic of high school dropouts, interest in exploring the issues of students' involvement in their learning is very limited (Dei et al., 1997). Many studies on the topic of high school dropouts have been conducted both quantitatively and qualitatively (Rumberger, 1987), but the majority of them are done quantitatively (Deyhle and Swisher, 1997). In the United States, an enormous amount of quantitative research on school dropouts tends to focus on statistical data in the various counties and states of that country. This is evidenced, for example, in the publication of the *Kids Count Data Book*, which is designed to publish data annually on the profile of children in Baltimore (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2000). Each county and state has its own *Kids Count Data Book*. Other studies on high school dropouts for the most part focus on drugs (Obot and Anthony, 2000), health issues (Eggert et al., 1999), labour and schooling (Grubb, 1999), students' characteristics (Ramsey,

1989) and prevention programs (McCool, 1994), but they tend to disregard students' perception of how they can succeed in school.

Many researchers and government agencies in Canada have conducted studies for the purpose of generating quick-fix stay-in-school programs (Levin, 1990). As commissioned by the Ontario Ministry of Education in Canada, Desnoyers and Parker (1988) examined school attendance and non-school attendance in Canada and the United States. The result of this research summarizes information about methods and programs that are suitable for increasing school attendance and decreasing absenteeism and the dropout rate, but absent from the discussion is the importance of including students in their learning. King, Warren, Michaliski, and Peart (1988) investigated thirteen high schools in Ontario to explore the relationship between the part-time employment of students in Ontario and the dropout rate. Methods for evaluating students' progress and a variety of alternative models for secondary schools are described. While extensive data is provided about dropout-prevention programs, there is no mention of inclusion of students' voices in this report. Wittenburg (1988) summarizes the literature on the characteristics of youth-at-risk and the factors that cause these students to drop out. Again, this report describes methods of improving school retention in Ontario, but omits any reference to the importance of students' involvement in their learning. In British Columbia, Wideen, Pye, Naylor, and Crofton (1990) described the dropout phenomenon in that province. While this description is useful in portraying such factors as personal characteristics, social and economical conditions of dropouts, it fails to address the issue of students' voices being heard

in public schools. Another study, done by Jeffrey Frank (1995) for Employment and Immigration Canada, reports on a national survey that compares high school graduates with dropouts. The comparison between the two groups is astounding and helps to emphasize the importance of achieving a high school certificate. However, it neglects to deal with the issue of allowing students to participate verbally and actively in their schooling as a factor that could enhance learning and thereby reduce the dropout rate. Research papers commissioned by Human Resource Development Canada (2001) deals with the definitions and costs of dropping out of high school. Again, this offers pertinent information to the Canadian public, but lacks information on reforms that would allow students' voices to be heard as a means of increasing school retention.

In Quebec, some studies commissioned by Le Ministère d'Éducation du Québec were conducted by Violette (1991) and Bouchard and St. Amant (1994). The aim of these studies was to inform the government about the high school dropout problem in the province. Similar to most studies, both of these concentrated on students who had dropped out of school and not the potential dropouts. While Bouchard's and St. Amant's work explored the reason dropouts go to adult education, Violette's study was interesting for some of its conclusions compared favourably to parts of this analysis. For example, Violette (1991) expressed the notion that the symptoms of potential dropouts are evident in schools, but students with these symptoms do not receive the support needed and necessary to avoid the problem of dropping out of school. This lack of support ends with their decision to leave school prematurely.

These studies (among others) have placed emphasis on stay in school initiative programs. For example, The Joining Forces Initiative: The Quebec's Ministry of Education's Comprehensive Dropout Strategy (1999) could be viewed as a direct result of Violette's study. The result of these studies is evidenced in a proliferation of programs for the purpose of reducing the dropout rate. Consequently, a lot of effort, time and money are spent on the examination and assessment of these programs, and in most cases the results of the dropout rate remain the same. The programs fail and the students continue to leave school prematurely, perhaps because the students' voices are silent in the reforms (Levin, 1990).

Levin (1990) expresses his displeasure with the proliferation of these programs and suggests that there is little evidence to support the efficacy of the dropout programs. In opposing the variety of approaches for preventing school dropouts, the author contends that extensive and fundamental changes to the entire Canadian educational system are needed if the dropout rate is to be reduced. Instead of recommending more programs that focus on changing student variables to reduce the dropout rate, Levin (1990) takes the position that it is the schools themselves that should change. He further asserts that the solution to the dropout problem is to restructure schools and make them more effective for all students rather than concentrating on programs that only benefit a few.

McCool (1994) examined the social context of high school dropouts in Quebec. This study analyzes the causes of dropping out and gives a description of programs designed by the Quebec Ministry of Education to deal with the problem.

The intersection of the personal and theoretical creation on the Back on Track experimental program for high school dropouts and youths at risk by Ruggles (1998) is a description of another stay in school initiative program in Quebec. Ruggles' work examines a program in Quebec that focuses on encouraging at-risk students to stay in school. The students in the program that Ruggles (1998) studied were helped to acquire some form of vocational skills by refurbishing furniture. These studies offer a profile of academic achievers and school failures in Quebec, and discuss the high school dropout phenomenon and its social and financial impact, but lack insights into students as actors in their own school life (Jefferies et al., 2002).

As most of the studies on high school dropouts were done quantitatively, they do not take into account the lived experiences of students, their experiences and interpretation of the world (Fine, 1987; Farrell, 1988). The lived experiences of students are of paramount importance in the understanding of how students become alienated from school and why some finally drop out. Those researchers have also ignored the incongruence that exists between the structure of the school, its socialization process and the lives of most of the students who are at risk of dropping out (Althusser, 1972; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Deyhle and Swisher, 1997; Dei et al., 1997).

As I stated earlier, an abundant amount of government-funded research exists presently, and it has generated a proliferation of dropout initiative programs. But to date, most of these programs appear to have made little difference in the achievement of school success for students who are identified as being at risk of

dropping out (Gradwell, 2002). Perhaps one of the reasons for their ineffectiveness is that they have not dealt with factors such as students' emotion and interpretation. These agents are inextricably intertwined with the students' social location. As a result, this could be a factor in prolonging the dropout phenomenon instead of abating it. So today, the high school dropout rate is still a matter of grave concern.

A general survey of environmental, social, attitudinal, personal and economic factors was conducted in Canada. The research focused on the problems and issues that contribute to the high school dropout phenomenon throughout the country (Statistic Canada 1991). This study confirmed that the most common reasons cited by students who had dropped out of school were: a preference to work, boredom, problems with schoolwork, financial reasons, problems with teachers, pregnancy, and marriage (King et al. 1988; and Ministry of Education, Quebec 1991). Studies done in the United States have indicated similar results (Conroy, 1966; Finn, 1984). However, these manifestations may only be symptomatic of the real problem (Glasser, 1986). There are other reasons inherent in the very nature of the public school system itself that can cause students to drop out of high school (McLaren, 1994; Dei et al, 1997; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Violette, 1991). For example, the school's bureaucratic structure, content, and its socialization process (Callahan, 1962; Katz, 1971; Spring, 1986).

Students' social location is an important factor in determining how they fit into public schools on a whole (Deyhle and Swisher, 1997). The schools' structure, content and socialization process impact differently on students from each stratum of society. The following section of this chapter summarizes academic sociological

studies that focus on the role of students' social location in reproducing inequalities, including the dropout problem.

2.2 A structure that militates against school success for some students

Public schools are viewed as being bureaucratically structured because of its business-like orientation (Bennett and LeCompte, 1995). Weber (1962) suggests that bureaucracies operate by means of rules which rationally and systematically establish what each person is expected to do – and often how they are to do it as well. These rules are the basis for systems of accountability and apply to all jobholders. This is the functionalist view, which also espoused that all workers in bureaucracies should not have divided loyalties and should be rewarded according to their skill and training (Blau and Scott, 1962). Workers with more training and responsibilities should be paid more and hold higher positions than those with less training and responsibilities (Blau and Scott, 1962; Dalton, Barnes and Zelenik, 1968; Weber, 1962). Blau and Scott (1962) expressed the notion that these are functional rules that organizations use as a guide, but the rules do not describe exactly how any organization operates. It is necessary for each organization to adapt the formal rules for its own smooth functioning.

Bennett and LeCompte (1995) suggest that schools were deliberately structured to resemble other kinds of bureaucratic organizations in our modern society. Katz (1971) argues that bureaucratic organizations assume the shape they have because policy makers gave priority to order, uniformity and efficiency. Schools develop and change in response to these priorities that corresponds to the bureaucratization of large

hospitals, government agencies, factories and society in general (Bowles and Gintis, 1976). But because organizations and institutions do not exist in isolation, they are part of the social fabric of society, and the social context must be considered. In so doing, the physical arrangements as well as the characteristics of their inhabitants are important factors for consideration, as they shape how people behave within the organization or institution and how they feel about themselves (Bennett and LeCompte, 1995).

Researchers have therefore investigated the high school dropout problem by examining the school structure and what goes on in the classroom (Oakes, 1985; Keddie, 1971; Rist, 1970; Mickelson and Smith, 1989; King, 2001). This structuralist view argues that actors are constrained by the structural features of society, thus they are prevented from being self-directed (Althusser, 1972). This perspective views social actors as responding to their social environment. Proponents of the structuralist view express the notion that dominant social forces dictate the perception and reality of social actors. Bowles and Gintis (1976), in their disenchantment with this notion, suggest that the only means for effective social change would be through a social revolution.

In their book, *Schooling in Capitalist America*, Bowles and Gintis (1976) advanced the correspondence theory. The theory is very insightful, particularly in explaining the dynamics and social effect of schooling. Correspondence theory asserts that the hierarchically structured patterns of society are mirrored in classroom dynamics. Correspondence theory is consistent with the views of reproduction theorists, which are further explored in Chapter four of this thesis.

In the discussion on the effects of school structure on learning, Persell (1977) articulates her views in what she terms the structure of dominance. The central premise of this theory is that schools are structured according to the views and ideologies of the dominant group in society. The dominant group is defined as members of the upper class who possess wealth and power. Persell (1977) suggests that, "The structure of dominance in a society is intimately bound up with the ideologies employed to legitimate that dominance" (P. 16). Persell also argues that the structure of dominance is closely related to educational outcomes. Hence, the public school structure favours students from the upper class, while it works against those who are from poor families. The structure of dominance therefore sets up unequal opportunities for school success for students whose families are poor. It is not surprising then that most students who drop out of high school come from poor families.

Students who do not "fit" into the monolithic educational structure invariably become alienated from school (McLaren, 1994; Deyhle and Swisher, 1997; Bowles and Gintis, 1976). The anti-social behaviours of students who are alienated from school are well-documented (Willis, 1977; Finn, 1987; McLaren, 1994). Deviant behaviours such as truancy and delinquency are some of the characteristics of these students (Rumberger, 1987). Students with these characteristics are among those who usually leave school prematurely. Needless to say, these are seen as failures to the society in general (Dei et al. 1997). On the other hand, some will argue (Wilson, 1991; McLaren, 1994; Deyhle and Swisher, 1997; Dei et al., 1997) that the factors causing alienation in school may be so "traumatic" (to use Wilson's

word) that these students drop out of school because they perceive dropping out to be the only alternative available to them. To leave school prematurely for them is a form of “success” in survival (Wilson, 1991). However, Cookson (1992) suggests that there is an alternative to dropping out. The alternative Cookson (1992) suggests is one of reflection – which is to know one’s self. Gramsci (1971) argues that it is imperative to acquire skills that will enable one to navigate effectively in society. One should be able to adequately read, write and think critically if he or she is to be successful in this society.

Bowles and Gintis (1976) argued that schools reproduce the hierarchical workforce by teaching each member to accept, rather than question, his or her class location. Societal preparation for failure becomes sanctioned as it is viewed as individual inadequacy. Therefore to lack success in school is a personal and internalized fault of character (Sadovnik et al. 1994). But some students at the bottom rung of the ladder do not accept this rigid social order in society as natural and unchangeable. So they set up means of resistance, and in so doing some are “pushed out” while others drop out (Deyhle and Swisher, 1997).

Some students who are at risk of dropping out of high school construct means of resistance to the structure of the school (Dei et al., 1997). Resistance involves the attitudes, behaviours, and actions which challenge dominant institutional norms and practices, as means to effect social and institutional change (Deyhle and Swisher, 1997; Dei et al., 1997; McLaren, 1994). The theory of resistance is quite helpful in establishing an understanding of the causes of dropping out of high school. Further, it assists us in uncovering how social differences, based on such

factors as race, ethnicity, and social-economic class and gender, restrict the educational and life opportunities of some students (Giroux, 1983; Willis, 1977). One can also learn how public schooling privileges and engages certain groups, while disempowering others.

Resistance in school manifests itself in many forms. Dropping out of high school and the behaviours associated with “fading out” of school (e.g., truancy, lack of interest and participation in school, etc.) can be seen as forms of resistance (McLaren, 1994; Deyhle and Swisher, 1997; Bennett and LeCompte, 1995). However, increased student participation within school structures (e.g., establishing clubs, participating on student council, etc.), when engaged in as a means to effect institutional and social change, can also be regarded as a means of resistance. Even though engaging in the system to change it runs the risk of being co-opted by the same institution it challenges. The vision of an alternative structure qualifies these actions as resistance (Dei et al. 1997).

Some theories from research that focus on explaining the high school dropout problem include those that hypothesize a link between structural strain on institutions and the behaviour and attitudes of their employees and clients. LeCompte and Dworkin’s (1991) “structural strain and alienation” model argues that if social changes reduce the fit between school and society, then teachers and students are likely to perceive their efforts and participation as purposeless. The outcome of such a situation is burnout for teachers, and alienation and dropping out for the students (Dei et. al, 1997). The relevance of this model “lies in the introduction of key concepts such as, ‘alienation,’ ‘powerlessness,’ ‘meaningless,’

‘normlessness,’ and ‘isolation’ to explain why students give up on school when their lived realities do not match the expectation that society and schooling have created” (Lawton, 1992: 21).

The content and the process through which knowledge is transmitted are important factors that also need to be included in the discussion (Giroux, 1981), but are rarely considered in quantitative studies. Cultural and critical researchers have investigated some of these issues and have offered further insights into the kind of research directions needed to understand schooling experiences from the students’ point of view (Deyhle and Swisher, 1997). McLaren (1994) and Persell (1977) have reminded us that social differences based on such dynamics as race, ethnicity and social class have a great impact on students’ learning. In school, these factors privilege students who are in the upper class and militate against those who are from working class homes, or those who have minority status (Dei, et al., 1997). Bernstein (1977), Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) have argued that the public school system that was built on middle class values supports and transmits these values through socialization and content.

What follows is an uncovering of various social, political and economic conditions that directly or indirectly impact on students in school. These conditions (according to the views of the selected critical thinkers) have substantial influence on school outcomes for each student (Dei et al., 1997).

2.3 THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF THE DROPOUT PHENOMENON

Some researchers (e.g. Kantor and Lowe, 1995) argue that analyses of educational problems are frequently made without taking into consideration the broader historical context of the problem. Kantor and Lowe express this view thus, “they tend to focus on relatively secondary issues at the expense of more fundamental questions about the relationship between race, class and the state...” (p. 4). In this section, I have examined some theories of social class, race, gender, culture and poverty in relationship to the dropout phenomenon of students in the Canadian public school system. Other views such as: self-esteem, deviance and learning disability are also included in this section for all these factors add to the complexity of the dropout phenomenon.

2.3.1 Social class

A number of critical and cultural researchers (Apple, 1982; 1986; Arnot, 1981; Aronowitz, 1981; Dei et al., 1997; Giroux, 1981; 1992; Mackay and Myles, 1989; McLaren, 1994 and Persell, 1977) have examined issues of students’ social class, race and gender, as factors they believe contribute to the high school drop out problem. The authors argue that social class, race and gender are inextricably intertwined with students’ culture, value and beliefs, language as well as personal attitudes. They suggest that sometimes the agencies of class, race and gender of some students conflict with the norms and values of the public school system. Stated in the Quebec Curriculum Reform (1997) is an acknowledgment that, “There is a clear relation between academic failure and social standing; from now,

on the position of each individual with respect to knowledge will increasingly determine his or her place in society” (p. 14).

McLaren (1994) defines social class as “the economic, social and political relationship that govern life in a given social order” (p. 176). Of course, this is the Marxist’s view, but Weber (1947) argues that social class is positional. He defines it as a function of ones’ occupation, income and to some extent educational level. Class is divided into social hierarchy or strata of upper-upper class, lower-upper class, upper-middle class, lower-middle class, upper-lower class (working class), and lower-lower class (Bensman and Vidich, 1971; Persell, 1977). “Membership in a social class is determined by the way people relate to the economic material and conditions of life, how much of them they control, and how much they are beneficiaries of the productive efforts. Those individuals who control more of or who benefit more from the economic order are those at the top of the pyramid” (Bennett and LeCompte, 1995: 173). Hence, the issue of class in relationship to school achievement is quite powerful (Deyhle and Swisher, 1997), for it tends to magnify class differences by sorting individuals into various occupational categories, not so much by their ability, but according to their social class origins (Rist, 1970; Spring, 1985; Willis, 1977; LeCompte 1985; Kincheloe, 1993).

Thus, children are thought of as being more able, if they are from upper or middle class families, and as a consequence, they are pushed towards professional or more desirable careers. Similarly, lower class or minority children are viewed as less able, and are placed in vocational curricula with lower job expectations (Oakes 1985, Keddie 1971 and Kincheloe, 1993). In their work, Bowles and Gintis (1976)

focused our attention on the school's reinforcement of social differences, such as class, among students. In examining the classroom, the authors demonstrated how the institution of the school maintains that social differentiation among students (and extension all people) occurs naturally.

2.3.2 Race and its impact on schooling

Proponents of critical and cultural research view race as linked with social and economic stratification, as such it is perceived as a form of differential power in Western societies (Persell, 1977). McLaren (1994) argues that the lowest class in our society comprises whites and many ethnic minority groups who are economically disadvantaged. Some apply the word "caste" to emphasize the line of social demarcation that is clearly drawn racially between the rich and the poor (Berreman, 1972; Rist, 1970). In support of this notion, John Ogbu (1986) contends that both dominant and subordinate groups occupy cast-like strata in our society. Berreman (1972) refers to caste as the, "invidious distinctions imposed unalterably at birth upon whole categories of people to justify the unequal social distribution of power, livelihood, security, privilege, esteem, freedom – in short, life chances" (p. 410).

Winant (1994) contends that race remains "deeply fused with the power, order, and indeed the meaning systems of every society in which it operates" (p. 2). As such, there is an ideology that suggests that race is linked to intelligence, and that these hierarchical differences are measurable by the cultural achievements of such populations (Montagu, 1997). King and her colleagues (2001) suggest that

the stories of cultural achievements are perpetuated through the school curriculum, while Pinar (1993) argues that the school curriculum de-emphasizes the contributions of minority groups and emphasizes the accomplishments of those of white European descent, thereby creating racial disparities through a distorted history. History then, is used to legitimize the primacy of the white race and the hierarchical placements of all racial groups (King et al., 2001).

Consequently, a number of critical and cultural researchers (McLaren, 1994, Deyhle and Swisher, 1997) argue that it is virtually impossible to understand the classroom behaviour and performance of economically disadvantaged and minority students without first understanding their history as oppressed groups, their frames of reference and their everyday social practices. Ogbu (1986) demonstrates that historically, based along racial lines there are differences in social and economical opportunities for whites and blacks. He writes:

Black Americans did not begin their social, occupational, and political (class) differentiation because of differences in training, ability, or family background as did white Americans. Indeed, blacks were initially collectively relegated to menial status as slaves without regard to individual differences. For almost a century after emancipation from slavery they also experienced a high degree of status summation. That is, their occupation and other roles depended more on their membership in a subordinate racial group than an individual educational ability. They were restricted from competing for desirable jobs and social positions. (p. 268)

Dei et al. (1997) suggest that there is an existing need for an awareness of other factors that may be related to school failures, and hence the cause for dropping out of high school. They support the view that factors such as racial, ethnic and gender differences should be taken into account. As well, the exact relationship between employability and dropping out of school are other important factors that need to be explored (Lawton, 1994).

Clarke (1997) suggests that blacks in Canada have difficulty in carving out a niche for themselves in the social, political, economical and cultural affairs of this country, because they are placed in a deficit mold. The deficit model that is used, characterizes the group as a whole (Foster, 1996). Foster (1996) states that, “ a community is also defined by how outsiders see it” (p. 25), and the black community is perceived negatively in terms of education and upward social mobility (Clarke, 1997; McCaslin and Good, 1992). Many black immigrants came to Canada from societies that were in a colonial relationship with a metropolitan centre, and Canada, being the host country knows the colonial role. According to the colonial perception, black people are best suited for hard work that is only physical, and are incapable of managing intellectual problems (Castle, 1993). Hence, a deficit mold is created, and blacks as a people are placed in it (Clarke, 1997). So it is no coincidence that for decades the only jobs blacks in Canada could aspire to were porters on the railway, and domestic servants (Foster, 1996).

The deficit model is central to the experiences of blacks and other minority students in Canadian schools and in the society at large. As expressed by Persell (1977) these children usually are at a disadvantage as soon as they enter school, because for the most part they meet teachers who have preconceived notions of who they are, what they are capable of doing, and hence what their school outcomes should be. The fact that they are black and descendants of slaves are usually the predominant factors used in predetermining their school outcomes and their place in society. They are characterized as inferior, and because their colour is visible, they will never be able to assimilate into the larger society of the white

European background (Clarke, 1997; Foster, 1996). This has led some black activists and community leaders in Toronto to argue that "many young blacks are injured in the classroom more than on the streets" (Foster, 1996:30)

As mentioned earlier, blacks in North America are placed stereotypically in a deficit mold. Within the Canadian education system this pervasive stereotypical perspective also abound in characterizing black students. Unfortunately, for these students, most of these stereotypes are also centered on the "deficit model" (Deyhle and Swisher, 1997). The deficit model views some students as lacking the "abilities" necessary for school success. Failure in school is itself a deficit positioning of black students. Joseph (1976) in his experience as an immigrant student in Canada from the West Indies, said that "white teachers and white students have been taught to expect certain things from black students and it's a shame. It is sometimes true that the teacher expects you, because you are black, to smile and be gay and tap your fingers and have an American accent – to be dumb, in a sense. But the teacher should understand that he or she is dealing with individuals" (p. 257). Although some of these perspectives are myths, they have profound impact on the school life and outcomes of these students.

In Canada, the literature states that the black population on a whole experiences chronic under-achievement in school (Christensen, 1984; Foster, 1996; Dei, et al., 1997). Black students are over-represented in social affairs schools, alternative schools, detentions, and group homes (Christensen, 1984; Torczyner, 1997). As a group, blacks represent one of the minority groups with the highest dropout rate at the high school level in most provinces, especially here in Quebec

(Clarke 1997, Dei et al., 1997, Foster, 1996). They are at the lower end of the social and economical rungs of the ladder in North America (McLaren, 1994, Kincheloe, 1995; Dei et al., 1997; Clarke, 1997).

Blacks who live in the cities are relegated to what Foster (1996) calls “job ghettos.” Statistic Canada (1994) indicates that blacks in Canada are employed disproportionately in low paying, menial jobs in manufacturing, the hotel and tourism sectors, medical services – such as and nursing assistants, and domestics. A study conducted by the Ministry of Multiculturalism and Citizenship in Canada (1992), revealed that the largest job classifications for blacks in Toronto (where 75 percent of blacks in Canada reside) are clerical at 21 percent, manufacturing at 16 percent and the service industry had 13 percent. The same study also indicated that blacks living in that area had an annual salary of twenty-five thousand dollars or less (\$25 000). Of this number, some 23 percent have no wages – resulting from the higher rates of unemployment among blacks and their reliance on government assistance as their sole source of income. Of those who find work, 16 percent make between \$25 000 and \$49 000 per annum, and less than one percent earns \$50 000. Very few of them make it to management levels, yet fewer still, if any at all make it to the corporate boardrooms. It should not be a surprise then to learn that black persons earn less money on an average than the Canadian population as a whole. The average income for black persons in Canada in 1991 was \$20 617. 00, while the average Canadian rate was 15 percent higher, at \$24 000. 00 in the same year (Torczyner, 1997). This comparison sheds a lot of light on our understanding of the existing economic,

educational and social disparities among minority groups and the dominant groups in this society.

The caste-like conditions that impose unequal and unfair distribution of wealth and power on racial minorities (Berreman, 1972), is clearly demonstrated in a Statistics Canada report that revealed the socio-economic characteristics of certain racial/ethnic groups (1986). The report indicated that blacks with university degrees were in thirteenth place with 19.6 percent of the population. This is directly behind people from Britain with 19.8 percent of the population earning a degree. Yet in the rank order of average income in Canada, people of British origin were in fifth place, while blacks were in nineteenth place. The rank order place that blacks occupied was the second to last of the twenty groups selected for this study. It is interesting to note that Portuguese people as a group were placed last on the list in the earning category, but they were also last in the area of academic achievement with 7.4 percent of the population earning a university degree.

As a result, some black students are disillusioned about being successful through education (Whaley and Smyer, 1998). Through observation of their position in school, parents and members of their community, they have learned at an early age to distrust public schools and white authority (McLaren, 1994). Ogbu (1986) advanced the notion that blacks in USA developed folk theories of “making it” because of their past and present experiences with job ceilings and technocratic barriers. Making it in this sense does not necessarily involve academic success for black students, but for them – making it in school is quite elusive. So they employ personal strategies to foster their own cultural capital as a means of survival (Ogbu,

1986). Usually, their cultural capital is incongruent to that of the school, which is associated with values of the dominant groups in society. The clash of both cultures usually sets up dissonance in schools and eventually the minority students drop out or are pushed out.

In researching another minority group, Ryan (1989) explored the practices of traditional schooling and their effects on Native students from an Innu Community. From the result of this research, the author contends that the Euro-Canadian orientation and practices of Canadian schools alienate native students and cause them to drop out of school.

Wilson (1991) in her research studied students from six Sioux Indian high schools in Canada. The study focused on the nature of the students' experiences during their transition from an elementary school on the reservation to public high schools. The result of this study indicated that when the students were transferred from the reservation where they experienced success at the elementary level to the public high schools, there was a lack of culturally appropriate interfacing with white teachers. The mechanisms that existed were unsuitable to ease the transition from a rural to an urban environment. These inappropriate mechanisms created cultural discontinuities and cognitive ambiguities, which resulted in the underachievement of most Indians who attend public schools. At the outset of the research there were twenty-three students involved. Of that number, only five graduated from high school and none of them went to university. From her study, Wilson (1991) concluded that:

Often, success or failure to learn is related to the acquisition of communication skills, whose development is anchored in culturally congruent, meaningful social exchanges. Academic success or failure is more a reflection of the sociocultural system that offers or denies a child the opportunity for meaningful social intercourse and thus for

cognitive development than it is an individual attribute. Academic achievement is fully understandable only in its macrosocial, macroeconomic, and macropolitical context. Both academic success and failure are socially constructed. (p. 381)

Statistics Canada (1991) reported that Native students cited racism as one of the primary factors that influenced their decision to drop out of school. Some students suggest that they were uncomfortable in school because of teasing by other students. The sense of not belonging to the dominant group also isolated them.

An examination of equity issues regarding the Aboriginal peoples of Canada, reveals that the education attainment of Aboriginal population is lower than that of non-Aboriginal population. Compared with non-Aboriginal population, a higher percentage of Aboriginal population do not complete high school. Among linguistic minorities, individuals whose mother tongue is other than English or French (including those whose first language is an Aboriginal language) are less likely than anglophones and francophones to graduate from high school (Statistics Canada, 1999).

Therefore, some minority students perceive the functionalist view of upward mobility through meritocracy in education as a myth. Education, “the great equalizer,” does not appear to be relevant to those students. King et al. (2001) and Wilson (1991) noted that minority students are labeled “inferior” and thereby find that their social, economical and employment opportunities are be very limited. In Montreal a survey indicated that 18.3 percent of blacks with a Bachelor degree were unemployed as compared to 6 percent of people who were not black (Torczyner, 1997). Clarke (1997) states that, “Even university education isn’t a guarantee for economic and social mobility for minority students. One in six

(black) persons with a university degree was poor in 1991 in Montreal” (p. 29). The report also revealed that it is easier for a white high school dropout to find employment in Montreal than a black university graduate to do so.

From an economic perspective, some researchers posit the notion that the public school system is closely tied to placement in the labour market (Bowles and Gintis 1976, Persell 1977; Kantor and Lowe, 1995; Castle, 1993; Howe, 1994; Kincheloe, 1995). On the issues of equality for minority students, studies such as those of Manski (1989), Stage (1989), and Bickel and Papagiannis (1988) have utilized economic models of cost benefit analysis to explain the causes of dropping out. Stage (1989), and Bickel and Papagiannis (1988) focus on local economic conditions, arguing that high school students will more likely stay in school and graduate if there is a good chance of getting employment and improving their incomes with a completed education. On the other hand, if minority students feel that local conditions make employment unlikely, regardless of education level, then it is highly probable that they will leave school prematurely.

These theories provide additional insights into students’ rational and calculated decision to stay, or leave school. The potential dropouts analyze their social circumstances while they are still in school and for the most part, think that they could be better off economically by doing something else (Bickel and Papagiannis, 1988). But even here, the complex web of social, structural, cultural, and institutional factors that come in to play are excluded from such an analysis (Dei et al. 1997). When these factors are considered, the situation appears even

more mind-boggling. Consequently, some students view dropping out of school an alternative to staying and “wasting their time” (Deyhle and Swisher, 1997).

However, most students who think that they would be better off economically and thus leave school prematurely, unfortunately find out later that their assumptions were false. Similarly, students who drop out because they perceive staying in school to be a waste of time, usually end up wasting their time outside of school. They frequently engage in activities that cannot be classified as “productive” or “worthwhile” when they drop out. So essentially, they do not benefit from an early school departure. This view can be supported by the research on dropouts in relationship to drugs (Eggert et al. 2001; Grant et al. 2001); prison (Duguid and Ray, 1998), poor health (Levin, 1972), underemployment (Conference Board of Canada, 1992; Grubb, 1999) and undeveloped interests (Callan, 1992). Furthermore, Bickel and his colleagues (1995) replicated the work mentioned above, by Bickel and Papagiannis (1988) with a view to remedy methodological and substantive difficulties. The result of the 1995 research revealed that the students’ decision-making processes to drop out of school are often “unself-conscious” and based on imperfect information.

2.3.3 The issue of gender

Children learn to belong to any society or group through a socialization process. Through this process they learn appropriate behaviours according to the cultural norms of the society or group to which they belong (Maccoby 1966; Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974). Lee and Gropper (1974) suggested that males and

females are socialized differently through child-rearing practices because of differential expectations in life-style for each gender. When children are taught to behave in ways that are considered gender appropriate, sex role stereotyping occurs (Bennett and LeCompte, 1995). Gender socialization process that usually begins in the home continues in school. Dworkin and Dworkin (1982) stated that the differential patterns of socialization and treatment in school placed female students in a position that was very similar to that of poor and disadvantaged minority groups.

As early as 1951, Hacker examined gender relations and argued that women should be included in studies that were conducted on minority groups. Critical researchers (McLaren, 1994; Willis, 1977; Deyhle and Swisher, 1997) called attention to the importance of examining the issues of gender in the classroom. These researchers have pointed out that school results are closely related to the students' gender and economic station in life, so students are usually encouraged towards fulfillment of traditional gender roles (Bennett and LeCompte 1995). In their study, Blau and Duncan (1967) noticed that the educational and socioeconomic status of fathers tended to be the same as that of their sons. They concluded that status in society is inherited, rather than achieved. Thus, this accounts for the inflexible nature of the whole system of class status in capitalist countries. Blau and Duncan (1967) also suggested that, irrespective of the interpretations placed on how individuals life chances are determined, there can be no denying that the process of schooling is linked as closely to the structure of inequality as it is to having opportunities.

Female students from the middle and upper classes are perceived as thrifty, industrious, docile, well-mannered and have the ability to articulate effectively in the language of the school. Students in this category usually experience a high rate of school success. However, female students who are poor and are from minority groups are not only disadvantaged because of their racial/ethnic and economical status, but they are placed in a subordinate position because of their gender (McLaren, 1994).

The societal constraints and structural inequalities that are levied on this group of students were unnoticed for quite some time (McRobbie and Garber, 1980). As such, there exists a paucity of literature on this topic. McLaren (1994) claims that, "The female in contemporary school culture is often overlooked – fenced off from the mainstream of sociological writing on youth – which may be explained in part by the predominance of males in the field of educational study" (p. 211). Feminist researchers (McRobbie and Garber, 1980) suggest that there is need for more classroom investigations to be conducted on gender issues with specific regards to disadvantaged female students.

Public schools transmit and reinforce those ideologies that reflect the prevailing values of a male-dominated, hierarchical upper and middle class and social structure (King et al., 2001). The social lives of most female students from disadvantaged homes have been developed as a distinctive subculture. In schools some students deliberately resist the female role expectations and patriarchal codes that school tend to exert on them. With this resistance, conflict usually occurs between the school and the female (McLaren, 1982). Research on the issue of females in the classroom has

demonstrated that incidents of violence, sexism and racism among female students in the classroom are reactions to the economic and cultural dislocation (McLaren, 1982). These behaviours are also reactions to what is perceived as oppressive experiences of schooling (Irvine, 1979).

The prevailing ideology that promises school success to any student who works hard and makes sacrifices, acts as a barrier to prevent “disadvantaged female students from understanding how they were being fed into a preordained future by the patriarchal, economic and cultural forces of consumer capitalism” (McLaren, 1994:216). Believing that they are unable to cope in school and that they lack the intelligence of their upper and middle class counter-parts, many economic and socially disadvantaged female students give up on school and drop out. However, far more disadvantaged boys drop out of school than girls do.

Many provinces in Canada are experiencing concern regarding the high dropout rate of boys. In an article in the *Globe and Mail* entitled, “Are Schools Failing Boys” Fine (2001) states that many boys in New Brunswick believe that school holds nothing for them. On the same topic, Prof. Wilms who carries out research on international literacy at the University of New Brunswick said, “There is a growing number of boys who don’t see bright prospects for themselves for the future” (*Globe and Mail*, September 5: 1, 2001). The story is the same in British Columbia where 30 percent of boys drop out of high school compared to 20 percent of girls. Across Canada (e.g. Saskatchewan, Ontario and Quebec) the evidence is mounting that boys are falling behind girls academically (Statistics Canada, 1996).

Poole and Lowe (1982) in examining the values of adolescents in relationship to their schooling reported that gender was a significant determinant in the dropout issue. The report indicated that female students accept the norms of the school more readily than male students do. Irvine (1979) advanced the notion of schools being sites that promote 'feminine' values in students. In his study, he suggested that high school dropouts from ethnic and lower socio-economic backgrounds tested higher on the masculinity section of a California Psychological Inventory. In *Learning to labour*, Willis (1977) points out that male students in England from working-class background resisted the dominant ideology of the school through emphasizing and celebrating physical labour and masculinity. They reject school learning and view it as effeminate. School learning to them is therefore socially inferior to physical labour and being masculine. Not surprisingly then, nearly all studies conducted recently indicate that boys have a higher dropout rate than girls (Violette, 1991; Rumberger, 1983; Poole and Lowe, 1982; Council of Education Canada, 1999; Statistics Canada, 1999).

A Statistics Canada Report (1999) revealed that there is a wide disparity in the dropout rate between boys and girls. The report indicated that in Canada 55 percent of the high school dropouts are boys, while 45 percent are girls. In Quebec, the situation is quite similar. The dropout rate of high school students in Quebec is the highest in Canada at 35 percent. There is an over-representation of blacks in this category. Statistics from Centrale de l'Enseignement du Quebec (the largest teachers' union in Quebec) show that boys are more at risk of dropping out of high school than girls. The probability of black boys dropping out of high school in

Quebec is 42.2 percent as opposed to 28 percent for black girls (1992). Quebec Education Department officials argue that this gap shows every sign of continuing to widen as the percentage points for 1975-1976 the spread was 10.5, 1987- 1988 it was 11.8, and in 1989-1990 (the last year for which figures are available) the spread was 14.2. This alarming situation has serious implication for poor and minority students who tend to make up a large percent of the "at risk" groups either in "special classes" in the regular high schools, or in alternative schools. Henchey (1992), professor emeritus of educational studies and policy at McGill University calls it, " A nightmare scenario."

2.3.4 Culture

Crucial to this discourse, is the role of culture as an influential mediator between dominant structures and everyday life of human agents. This role, as espoused by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), adds context and complexity to the notion that schools only mirror the capitalist structures and logic of society. The authors claim that schools function with their own formal structures and individual cultures. They argue that schools, as institutions with such characteristics, are particularly capable of generating, and maintaining, the ideology of capitalist/bourgeois interest in society.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) and Bernstein (1977) identified culture as the link between schools and the class structure. Bernstein (1977) argued that class structure is embedded in the linguistic practices and the formal school curriculum. Bernstein's (1977) studies of differences in social class and linguistic codes suggest

that inequalities of social class begin with class-based differences in the linguistic codes of the family. These are in turn, reinforced by the schools. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) agree with Bernstein's notion of linguistic codes. They developed the concept of cultural capital to explain the function of schooling in the transmission of cultural capital. Bennett and LeCompte (1995) define cultural capital as including "the general capital background, knowledge and skills passed from one generation to the next and differs according to the social class background" (p. 17). It is suggested that some types of cultural capital are more valuable than others (Bennett and LeCompte, 1995). High culture (that is culture concerned with the arts, literature and languages, as well as interpersonal skill in verbal communication, cooperative work arrangements, creative endeavour, and what might be called middle class manners and behaviour that characterize the middle and upper classes) is the most highly valued. This type of cultural capital forms the basis on which schools are built (Bennett and LeCompte, 1995; Sadovnik et al. 1994).

Since schools embody the values and the ideals of the upper and middle classes, children who come from those backgrounds will be more familiar with the linguistic and cultural codes that are used within the school system (Bernstein, 1977). Children from lower social class backgrounds who are not familiar with these codes will have more difficulty understanding the school process. These students are described as "culturally deprived", and are judged by teachers to be less academically able. Such students are usually placed in reading groups for the "less capable" (Bennett, 1986). By contrast, students whose cultural and linguistic

competence is congruent with school expectations will be judged to be superior in their academic performance (Berstein, 1977; Persell, 1977). It seems then that public schools serve to reinforce the knowledge and competencies already acquired by middle and upper class children (Oakes, 1985; McLaren, 1994; Rist, 1970; Kincheloe, 1995).

2.3.5 Poverty as a risk factor

Poverty is closely associated with high rates of school dropouts (McLaren, 1994; Fine, 1991; Gilbert, 2001). "Poverty scars children. It harms their physical and mental health, their ability to learn, to make friends, to marry. It damages their self-esteem and undermines their skill at finding and keeping a job in later life" (*The Gazette, Montreal*, December 7: B 2, 1998). The plight of poor children in Canada was brought to the fore in 1985 when the National Council of Welfare indicated that over four million Canadians lived below the poverty line. The issue was further emphasized in 1989 when a report revealed that 934 000 or 14.5 percent of all children lived in poverty (Statistics Canada, 1989). This caught the attention of the Canadian Government, and in 1989, the House of Commons unanimously voted to end child poverty by the year 2000. But, contrary to the government's aim the proportion of children living in poverty began to increase in the early 1990's. The National Council of Welfare reported that in 1996 there was a substantial increase in the number of children who were poor in Canada as child poverty had reached an alarming 20.9 percent. Similar to the recession of the 1980s (Young, 1987), Canadians found themselves in another recession again in

2002. The increase in child poverty may have been exacerbated by the recession and the reduction in the availability of social programs such as unemployment insurance and social assistance that existed at that time (Statistics Canada, 1999). Needless to say that this impacted negatively on the lives of children who are poor. Consequently, their chances of school success will be reduced (Education Indicators in Canada, 1999).

Poverty is claimed to be one of the biggest factors to influence any students' decision to drop out of high school (Human Resources and Labour Canada, 1993). Many children in Canada are poor – 1.3 million, 18.8 percent of them (Statistics Canada, 1998). These children have higher rates of emotional and behavioural disorders, are less likely to perform well in school and many experience a lower level of acceptance by others. Poverty has such an adverse impact on the lives of children that the Canadian Government placed it on its agenda in the January 2001 Speech from the Throne. The Speech from the Throne emphasized that the government plans to, “ensure that no Canadian child suffers the debilitating effects of poverty by making the elimination of poverty a national project” (2001).

But children in low-income families face a wide range of disadvantages that can affect their performance in school. The National Council of Welfare suggests:

In the face of clear value for future economic well-being of extended education, why do poor kids tend to aim lower and drop out first? Why do they tend to do less well than their mental ability would indicate? The answer is not a single simple one. What happens to poor kids in school is the result of one factor after another, none of them alone responsible, but each shifting the odds against success for a poor kid a little further than the last (1985b: 20).

The issue of single parenting has been presented as one of the disadvantages of poor children (Young, 1987). Children in single-parent families, most of which

are headed by women are far more likely to be in low-income situation than are children in two-parent families (Statistics Canada, 1999). According to the a National Council of Welfare Report, the fact that women generally earn less than men creates a significant problem when the mother is the family's only income earner. Single income families are more likely to depend on government for social assistance. Sometimes this is their main source of income and are therefore, more likely to be affected in changes in government policies that do not work in their favour. "Four in 10 unattached women (those who live alone or with non-relatives) are poor. Almost half of unattached Canadians below the age of 25 at last count, as were 50 percent of the elderly" (National Council of Welfare Report, 1985: 1). Fully 92 percent of single mothers in Canada under the age of 25 are poor (*The Gazette, Montreal* – Editorials, 2000).

According to the article cited above, youth and inexperience in the work place are seen as other factors that affect the poor. Poverty in Canada and the United States tends to be the affair of young uneducated and unskilled mothers. Both in Canada and the United States, single mothers rank as the poorest of the poor. A Université du Québec à Montréal study examined data from 1991 and found that single parent families accounted for 71 percent of all Quebec families receiving welfare. The report indicated that single mothers stayed on welfare the longest of any group, while a quarter of them had been drawing benefits for 10 years or more.

There is also a relationship between an individual's socio-economic status and education (Young, 1987; Education Indicators in Canada, 1999). People from

low socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to complete high school than those from high socio-economic backgrounds. In Canada, between 1984 and 1994, university participation rates increased for persons in all backgrounds, however the increase was smallest for those in the lowest socio-economic backgrounds (Education Indicators in Canada, 1999). This of course widened the gap between the rich and the poor.

The literature has also indicated that poverty is closely linked with minority groups (Clarke, 1997; Torczyner, 1997). Torczyner's (1997) study indicated that 40 percent of black children live below the poverty level. Several Canadian studies have placed emphasis on poverty as a risk factor for putting youngsters in institutional care (National Council of Welfare, 1985, 1989, 1996; Statistics Canada, 1999). Once in care, poor children are likely to remain longer than non-poor children (National Council of Welfare, 1997; Angenent et al., 1991). The probability that a child will remain in care is more likely when that child has been in care for longer than 18 months (House of Commons, 1984). In fact, a Quebec study of family reunion showed that some black children and children from other minority groups in care, may never be reunited with their parents (Comité de la protection de la Jeunesse, 1987:26).

A study was carried out by a Joint Research Committee (1992) to investigate the issue of over-representation of black children in substitute care and detentions. It found that although blacks make up approximately 5.8 percent of the total English speaking population in Montreal, black children were over-represented in the anglophone youth network by almost 400 percent! The reasons for referral to Social

Affairs Institutions for substitute care were placed into five major categories: financial difficulties, abandonment, physical abuse, alleged neglect, and behavioural problems. The reason that was found to be the most significant by race – was financial difficulties for blacks. Because minority groups on a whole experience great financial difficulties they usually are unable to pay for proper supervision of their children. So their children are frequently left unsupervised by an adult. The Department of Social Affairs classifies unsupervised youngsters under the age of 16 as being abandoned or neglected. Youngsters who are thus classified are removed from their homes by the court and are placed in group homes, foster homes, or residential centres. In describing the youngsters that Batshaw Youth and Family Centres serve, the Executive Director of Services (1997) writes, “The stress placed on families due to poverty...reflects itself in our clientele” (What are the Services and Who are the Clientele: 4). For all children in this study, abandonment was the reason most frequently cited for referral to Social Affairs (28.3 percent).

Presently, Canadians are taken to task to address the issue of child poverty. The House of Commons Annual Report (1998) on child poverty in Canada indicated that, there is a 60 percent increase in the total population of children living below the poverty level. This certainly is a wake-up call for all Canadians, for the country will end up paying a steep price if it fails the estimated one in five children living in poverty. Those in the field of education should be mindful of the impact poverty has on learning.

2.4 OTHER VIEWS OF DROPPING OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL

Lawton (1992, 1994) synthesized the various theoretical positions, models, and frameworks that attempts to explain “dropping out.” Lawton (1992, 1990) points out that Finn’s (1989) “frustration/self-esteem” model views dropping out as a developmental process which usually begins in the earlier grades. Finn’s (1989) low self-esteem model is consistent with the deficit model that is put forth in functionalist paradigm which, was discussed earlier. This model suggests that poor and minority students who do not do well become frustrated early in school. With time their frustration can result in a lower self-image which eventually leads them to drop out. Dei, et al., (1997) are critical of this model. They argue that it does not adequately explain why some students do not do well in school in the first place. From my perspective, the notion of low self-esteem could be used to blame students and positions them in the deficit model. In so doing, the high school dropout phenomenon masks the structural and institutional inequities and contradictions with which these students have to cope (McLaren, 1994; Dei, et al. 1997). Deyhle and Swisher (1997) suggest that self-esteem may not be a useful concept for understanding the phenomenon of high school dropout, because it fails to acknowledge racial, ethnic, and cultural differences, as well as issues of class and gender.

Deviance has been advanced towards a theory of dropping out of school (LeCompte and Dworkin 1991). Deviance theory suggests that failing to support and respect the existing institutional norms, values, ethos, and rules of the school, students run the risk of being branded deviants. Consequently, these students may

be denied privileges and rewards that the institutions award well-behaved students (Sadovnik et al., 1994). With time then, those students who are labeled “deviants,” internalize the category into which they are placed, and then redefine themselves in terms of their deviant behaviours (McLaren, 1994, Rist, 1970). As they drift toward behaviours that offer their own rewards, rather than the institutional sanctions of the school, their oppositional behaviour acquires some legitimacy of its own. But because the school system does not tolerate frequent absenteeism, poor academic performance and truancy, the perpetrators of such behaviours are eventually “pushed out” of school (McLaren, 1994; Deyhle and Swisher, 1997). Ray Rist (1970) has documented the adverse effects of self-fulfilling prophecy, and labeling (1977) on school performance.

Dei et al. (1997) suggest that, the deviance model is particularly relevant for attracting attention to institutional structures and processes that rationalize school decisions to “push out” students who are non-conformists. But McLaren (1994) argues that, when deviance is viewed from a critical perspective, it does not highlight the problem of how it is constructed in society. This is important if the connection is to be made between school and its policies, and the wider social setting in accounting for the school dropouts. This accounting is essential for understanding the school experiences of students who are at risk of dropping out or being pushed out of school. The policies of schools towards non-conformists, towards those who act differently from the mainstream, or even look different, are a reflection of the social forces of society (Rist, 1970; Oakes, 1985; McLaren, 1994).

Society expects the school to legitimize certain hegemonic and ideological practices, while de-legitimizing others (Persell, 1977).

The participation-identification model is a distinct, yet related theoretical approach to explaining dropping out (J. D. Finn, 1997). This model postulates that students' involvement in school activities usually results in their identification and social attraction to a group. Conversely, the lack of participation results in a lack of identification (J. D. Finn, 1997). Lawton (1992) also suggests that students will maximize their likelihood of successfully completing school if each one "maintains a high level of participation in school-relevant activities" (1992:20). However, Dei et al. (1997) argue that marginalized students can become isolated from the mainstream student body because they may feel alienated from the school system as a whole. Consequently, these students do not participate in any school activity, so they drop out. From my viewpoint, this model can be used to understand the impact of marginalization of visible minority students in Eurocentric educational institutions, but it does not adequately address how and why some students become marginalized. It also does not account for the reason those students, who identify with the school system, could still fade out, and eventually drop out (Dei et al., 1997; Deyhle and Swisher, 1997; Wilson, 1991).

Finn (1997) in his research suggested that involvement in school activities, and positive school behaviours can increase the chances of school success for at-risk students. Going to school on time, completing the required course work can make academic success more attainable for those students considered at-risk, even if negative influences exist. This study examined the academic achievement of

minority students who are at high risk of dropping out of school. But some students' life experiences and position in society may not be compatible with the norm. The incompatibility of their home life with that of school personnel sets up dissonance in the school environment for them. Sometimes they are unable to do assignments because of disruption in the family. Sometimes other factors beyond their control rob them of sleep, so they have difficulty with punctuality in school. Since the school does not tolerate tardiness and other unacceptable behaviours, these students usually become likely candidates for high school dropouts (Teacher interviewed for this project).

2.4.1 Learning disability

Lichtenstein's (1989) study concluded that students with mild physical disabilities (i.e., hearing, speech or health impairment) contribute to dropout phenomenon. Students showing any or all signs of these conditions are more likely to drop out of school than their non-impaired peers. The focus of this study is aimed at describing the relationship between specific disabilities and the drop out rate. Curly (1971) argued that dropouts repeat grades five times more often than graduates. This astounding correlation between grade retention and dropping out illustrates the extensive damage of early failure to students who perform poorly. In part, the poor academic performance of some students at risk of dropping out is due to learning disabilities. The widely recognized problems of the dropout include difficulties with math, spelling and especially reading (in which the dropout is usually two years behind). Brown and Paterson (1969) find that some dropouts

have an inability to memorize and retain information. Unless action is taken to minimize these weaknesses, these children are most likely to become failures and consequently dropouts. Unfortunately, teachers often compound the problem by having unrealistic high expectations for these disadvantaged students although in most cases the students are denied the necessary help they need. When the youngsters are unable to meet their teachers' expectations, their self-images as failures are augmented. To worsen matters, the potential dropouts are typically unable to find much needed companionship among teachers (Cervantes, 1965).

The results of numerous qualitative and quantitative studies have been examined in this chapter and have concluded that there are numerous factors related to the reason students drop out of high school. These factors are usually associated with the students' family, school and community (Natriello, 1986; Rumberger, 1987; Weis, Farrar & Petrie, 1989). Although existing research on the cause of high school dropout is quite extensive, it suffers from several shortcomings, as most of the work has concentrated on providing reforms from the perspective of academics, government appointed commissions, social scientists and consultants. Rarely do the students' concern about school and their perspective of school and success is addressed. Literature on the subject has suggested that models of remediation that were adopted from the results of studies that excluded those students' concerns have so far failed.

2.5 INVOLVING STUDENTS IN THEIR LEARNING

The prevailing evidence has shown that education reforms to date have been incongruent with the needs of potential high school dropout students to experience success in school (Ahlstrom and Havighurst, 1971; C.R. Jeffery and I. A. Jeffery, 1961). According to Kulka, Mann, and Klingel (1977) congruence between students and their learning environment is crucial for the achievement of positive school outcomes. The curriculum reforms in the past have failed, perhaps because they have excluded important factors in some of the theories, and have adhered mainly to the functionalist view of education. For example, in Quebec, the curriculum reforms of the 1970s entitled, *The Schools of Québec: Policy Statement and Plan of Action*, also known as the “Orange Paper,” (1977) concentrated on curriculum, measurement and evaluation, and text-books, with a view to increase the graduation rate. In 1982, the Conseil supérieur de l’éducation published about ten opinions on pedagogy and content in the elementary and high school sectors of the public educational system. Again, the primary aim of these changes was to ensure a decrease in the high school dropout rate. Other reforms were put in place from government-conducted research and reports. For example, *The Parent Report* in 1987-1988, *Joining Forces: A Plan of Action on Educational Success* (1992), *Learning From the Past* (1994), and *The Quality of Education: A Challenge for each Educational Institution* (1996-1997). All these reform programs have failed, and may continue to fail, because whatever structure, method and curriculum are put in place could prove to be inadequate unless the students have a direct involvement in its planning process.

Farrell (1988) studied at-risk students in an urban setting. The research concluded that, “any possible solution to the high school dropout problem must entail programs based on the perceptions of students rather than on educational theory” (p. 4). Fine (1987) conducted an ethnography study based on participant observation. The findings of that research suggested that both the content of the urban social setting and the structure of the school actually contributed to the dropout rate. It also indicated that the students’ experiences in school and their voices of protest and inquiry were directly and indirectly silenced in schools.

CHAPTER 3

PUBLIC EDUCATION IN CANADA AND QUEBEC: HISTORY AND PRESENT

Chapter two has given a literature review, which provides a multitude of critical lenses to understand the dropout phenomenon in North America, especially in Canada. To tease out factors that lead to failure in school and student dropout, we must understand the history and social conditions in which dropout takes place. This chapter will give an overview of the history and present conditions of education in Canada and Quebec.

The school dropout phenomenon has plagued Canada from its colonial days in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. So both the lack of adequate educational provision for its youngsters and school dropouts are issues that Canadians have had to wrestle with for centuries (Magnuson, 1992). Canada was an agricultural society until the 1890s, as such the consequences of dropping out of school were not as harmful to the individuals and society then as they are today (Ghosh, 1987). Previously (from colonial days up to the early part of the twentieth century – about the 1950s), individuals who dropped out of school were not as stigmatized as they are today. Neither were the dropouts presented with the numerous problems and complexities of living in a “schooled society” as they are today (Davis, S. and Guppy, N. 1998).

But with an increased and diverse population, an economic shift from natural resources to a knowledge-based one, and educational shift from a religious centered one to a socio-political one, the high rate of students who drop out of high school now is cause for grave concern to Canadians. The search for answers to this

Canadian problem has been a long and extensive one. To understand the present high school dropout dilemma, it is important to briefly examine the Canadian people and the history of its education system. For the problem appears to be deeply ingrained in the psyche of the people and by extension - the students. Therefore, the students are the ones with whom the answers to the dropout problem rest.

Quebec as a distinct society from the rest of Canada also has its roots in history and tradition (Henchey and Burgess, 1987). Therefore, many of its contemporary issues can only be understood in terms of their historical roots. An historical perspective is essential then, for an understanding of Quebec's current educational structures, institutions, policies and problems (Purdy, 1985). This brief historical review serves to highlight some factors that contributed to inadequate educational provisions and lack of school retention in Canada and Quebec from its colonial days to the twenty-first century. We are in the second year of the twenty-first century and the problem of high school dropout still exists. As such, it remains a continuation of the early colonial days and not a new problem.

3.1 A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN CANADA

3.1.1 Education in New France (1600 – 1759)

Education in Canada has its early beginnings as a colony known as New France. New France existed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when a vast territory of North America was under French influence and control (Magnuson, 1992). Geographically, New France extended from Acadia in the east to the Mississippi River basin in the west, and from Hudson Bay in the north to Louisiana in the south. But as a working colony, the population of New France was concentrated in Canada - the area bordering the St. Lawrence River between the towns of Quebec and Montreal (Magnuson, 1992).

Historically, the development of a school system in early Canada was less than successful (Lower, 1958). Magnuson, (1992) stated that “education was an exceptional activity in New France – that it did not reach out to the majority of the population” (p. 86). Hence, there was widespread illiteracy in Colonial Canada. It appears that some of the historical events that took place in early Canada significantly impacted and undermined the development of education during that period. From a review of Canadian history, the purpose of education, race and culture, school structure and content, attitude of parents and students towards schooling, child-rearing practices and social class and sexism, emerged as some of the factors that undermined the development of education in early Canada. As such, these factors are the legacy from the past to the present Canadian education

system. These factors appear to be closely related to today's high school dropout problem.

The purpose of education is significantly different today than it was in the period of colonial Canada. The primary purpose of education in seventeenth century Canada was the transmission of religion and European culture to the Native peoples of Canada (Purdy, 1985). Roman Catholic missionaries came to the new colony from France with the sole purpose of Christianizing and acculturating the Indians (Magnuson, 1992). For this purpose, education was used as an important tool in the evangelization and Frenchification campaign (Wade, 1964). For the missionaries believed that religious conversion was best secured when preceded and underscored by instruction in Christian doctrine and rituals (Magnuson, 1992). This view was pervasive throughout Canada until the period of modernization in the 1960s. "Information without religion is a positive evil," declared the Right Reverend John Strachan (1840) the Church of England's first bishop of Toronto (cited in *Social change and education in Canada*, p. 79).

With a view to encourage the Indians to lead a more sedentary life-style than the nomadic one they led, learning was also provided on Indian reserves (habitations provided by the French). The intent of this educational plan was to curb the roving instincts of the Indians in order to make them easier targets for conversion (Magnuson, 1992). In essence, the schools of New France were centres for moral and religious formation rather than places of mental learning (Eccles, 1987).

The education aims, curricula, pedagogy and instructional materials did not meet the needs or interests of the Indians (Battiste, 1986). The Indians were not in any way involved in planning their education, so their needs and interests were carelessly ignored (Purdy, 1987). Consequently, the system of education that was built on religious conversion and French acculturation failed (Magnuson, 1992). The Indians rejected the missionaries' efforts to teach and acculturate them so they dropped out of the school programs that were provided for them.

Another factor that militated against this educational venture in early Canada was the child-rearing practices of the Indians (Lower, 1977). The Indians held great affection for their children and as such, they were reluctant to allow their children to leave home for the purpose of attending *pensionnat* or boarding schools (Magnuson, 1980). So the students would eventually drop out of these schools too.

The Indians' life-style of hunting and fishing was incongruent with the demands of a sedentary way of life that was necessary for the formal schooling that the missionaries introduced (Wade, 1964). This also resulted in the failure of the Indian children and adults to attend the schools that were instituted by the missionaries. So the purpose of the education and difference in race and culture, were unfavourable to the Indians and led to the failure of their interest in formal learning (Eccles, 1987). To date, the Canadian school system has not been able to attract and maintain Indian students. As an ethnic group, Indians and Inuit represent the groups with the highest dropout rate in Canada and are the least literate (Douglas, 1987; Statistics Canada, 1999). McCorriston (1999) suggests

that, “low literacy is a big problem among Winnipeg’s Native population of 60 000 as about two-thirds of the adults have not completed high school” (p. 6).

As a result of the missionaries’ failure to attract and maintain the Indians’ interest in Christianity and the French culture, they turned their attention to the education of the children of French settlers in the latter part of the eighteenth century (Wade, 1964). The organization and administration of education were left in the hands of the church. At that time education was not structured, nor was it yet an instrument of national policy (Battiste, 1986). The modern view that the social and economic “health” of a nation is inextricably linked to education was an alien concept during the age of New France (Livingstone and Hart, 19987). The theory of human capital (Shultz and Erickson, 1982) had not yet been developed. There was no ministry of education or similar administrative body to manage learning at the central level, nor were there any school boards at the local level. There was no one person or body outside of the church to whom education was entrusted (Purdy, 1987). The educational structure was loose and schooling was conducted in buildings where available; while the more affluent parents hired lay teachers or tutors from France for the purpose of home schooling their children (Henchey and Burgess, 1987). The schools did not come together as a cohesive system as it is today.

Viewed in institutional terms, New France consisted of a loose collection of mostly elementary schools called *petites écoles* in and around the towns of Quebec, Montreal and Trois-Rivières. Supplementing and building on the elementary schools were a college run by the Jesuits in Quebec, several vocational schools and two seminaries. (Magnuson, 1992: 70)

Since the teachers who worked in colonial Canada were imported from France, it followed that classroom methods resembled that of the mother country (Wilson et al., 1970). As in the mother country, New France's teachers employed drill and memorization as the choice method of teaching. Teachers in France saw children as society saw them - dependent beings whose duty it was to respond to adult commands and values, therefore students were not allowed to explore learning materials independently (Wade, 1964). To this day, some teachers still view students "as empty vessels to be filled" and continue to deny students of their input and involvement in their learning (Woods, 1983). Physical punishment was also used as a method of teaching. Children who failed to manifest the proper interest in their studies, or who misbehaved were routinely punished often physically and sometimes severely (Magnuson, 1992).

Corporal punishment continued in Canadian schools well into the later part of the twentieth century (Wade, 1964). Formerly, students who did not understand schoolwork and could not successfully complete assignments stayed away from school rather than attend and be physically punished (Moir, 1967). Some would eventually drop out when interest began to wane. Although corporal punishment is no longer administered in Canadian schools, students are still punished for incomplete assignments with such methods as detentions or being deprived of activities they enjoy. Needless to say, after a while some students get discouraged and stay away from school permanently before they finish the program.

The relationship between teachers and their students in New France was also very similar to that of France (Magnuson, 1992). Teachers took their lead

from society thereby relating to their students in a most distant and formal manner (Henchey and Burgess, 1987). Woods (1983) paints a grim picture of the relationship between students and their teachers, whereby the teachers' task was to "civilize" the masses. As such, the emphasis was placed on teacher control of his/her students (Woods, 1983). Therefore, this situation did not allow for easy communication between teachers and their students. As a result, students' questions and independent input into classroom activities were less than appreciated by their teachers (Postman, 1995). From an interactionist' perspective, Woods (1983) argue that students place great importance on the relationship between their teachers and themselves. At the centre of interactionism is the notion of people as constructors of their own actions and meaning (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1976). The students construe their teachers' continuous actions of aloofness and control as unkindness. The interactionist perceives the interpretation of the other's action that counts as far as outcomes are concerned. Therefore people's own thoughts and evaluations become the reality of other's action (Woods, 1983). When the relationship is distant, students perceive their teachers as being uncaring and unkind. Poor relationships between teachers and students are some of the problems that existed in colonial Canada and they still do today (Magnuson, 1992). These problems tend to foster school disenchantment and encourage students to dropout (Wayman, 2002).

Like the teachers, the educational aims, curricula, pedagogy and instructional materials of the schools were imported from France. As such, the *petites écoles* of early Canada did what elementary schools in the mother country did – that is to

teach children to read, write, count and know God (Magnuson, 1992). On the scale of priorities the last was the highest, for the cultivation of piety took precedence over the learning of letters. But these did not satisfy the educational needs of frontier dwellers in early Canada. The foreign teachers, curricula and content were not relevant to the needs of the early student population in Canada (Purdy, 1987). Remedy for these problems were not addressed until late twentieth century when the Canadian Studies Foundation (1970 – 1985) mandated schools in Canada to develop and distribute learning materials and teaching strategies related to Canadian studies. The Foundation also suggested that teachers should be encouraged to use Canadian education materials and to teach their students about Canada. This is another area in which the educational development in early Canada failed, for the major focus was placed on the imported culture of France which did not take into consideration the identity of the new Canadians (Livingstone and Hart, 1987).

The lack of an organized body that was responsible for education and irrelevant or inadequate content were factors that militated against the successful development of education, to meet the needs of the student population in early Canada. The schools were not regulated and as such, they were unevenly dispersed between boys and girls, urban and rural centres (Purdy, 1987). There were more schools in the urban centres while in some rural areas no school existed at all (Magnuson, 1992). These factors appear to have had a substantial negative impact on many children in the colony. For the most part, they grew up without any experience in formal learning. Today, schools in the rural areas of Quebec suffer

from a high rate of students leaving prematurely because of lack of public transportation (Lampert, 2002).

Inaccessibility of educational facilities in the rural parts of Quebec continued to be a problem until the period of the Quiet Revolution in the 1960's (Henchey and Burgess, 1987). (The Quiet Revolution – a general period of reform in Quebec's history will be discussed later in this section of the paper). By its very nature this situation significantly contributes to inequality of access which inevitably leads to unequal education outcomes for rural students. According to Lévesque (1979) equality of access to formal educational structures and services means that all individuals, regardless of sex, race, religion or social class should have equal opportunity of access to education. The school expansion of the Quiet Revolution in Quebec failed to address suitable programs for all students (Henchey and Burgess, 1987). Although inaccessibility of appropriate school programs for a number of students is still a problem, and the dropout phenomenon is such a troubling issue now, the Quebec Government disagrees with the view of lack of appropriate programs in schools. Consequently, the government has shifted the focus of the present curriculum on pedagogy from access to schooling to success in school. This paradigm shift is done with an aim to improve the high school retention rate (Ministère de l'Éducation, 1997). This appears to be somewhat shortsighted as school success to a large extent does depend on access to suitable programs (McLaren, 1994; Dei et al., 1997; Deyhle and Swisher, 1997).

Another factor that influenced the dropout phenomenon in early Canada is the attitude of the new Canadians towards formal learning (Battiste, 1986). For as

the population of the colony grew with more inhabitants born in Canada than in France, different values and priorities developed (Purdy, (1985). These settlers were for the most part unlettered and they perceived formal learning as having little or no value to them at that time. Collectively, the adults in the society exerted deliberate efforts to sabotage formal learning and to shape the next generation as they saw fit (Livingstone and Hart, 1987). Michael Apple (1983) argues that tensions within the larger society effect “the content of the curricula, its form (or how it is organized), and the process of decision making shapes it” (p. 322). This appears to have been the situation in early Canada. The new Canadians were land-clearers, farmers, fishermen and hunters. Parkman (1963) describes their attitude towards formal learning very well by saying, “As for the inhabitants, the forest, lake and river were his true school; and here, at least, he was an apt student” (cited in Roy, *Inventaire des ordonnances des intentants de la Nouvelle France*, 2: 11). The habitants (as the new Canadians were called) had more pressing concerns than learning to read and write. “The written word held less attraction for the Canadians, who preferred the active life of the frontier” (Magnuson, 1992: 1). The major concern of the settlers was wresting a living from the rough and hostile land. “The time and place demanded strong bodies and stout heart, and the acquisition of learning offered little protection against a bad harvest (Magnuson, 1992: 93).

The habitants’ preference for the carefree and active live of the frontier to formal learning, a dispersed population, and an absence of villages and village life, all impacted on the child-rearing practices of that period (Wade, 1964). The children of early Canadian society enjoyed a greater amount of freedom and

individual recognition than did their counterpart in France because their parents were indulgent (Lower, 1953). The eighteenth century intendant in New France, Jacque Raudot suggested that their educational institution should counteract the influences of the rural parents. He accused the colonial settlers of failing to demand respect from their children, or discipline them. The following is his view of the settlers' child-rearing practices:

The inhabitants of this land had never had an education. Because of the weakness that comes from an insane love that their fathers and mothers have for them in their infancy, in the manner of the savages, they are not corrected and their character is not formed. (ANQ, Greffe of Gilles Rageot, April 18, 1674)

As a result of the permissive child-rearing practices employed by members of the frontier society, their children were not encouraged to attend school. "Children were being reared in complete freedom and idleness by their parents" (cited in Tétu and Gagnon, *Mandements*, 547 – 9). This attitude can be a contributing factor to the lack of interest some students - especially boys, now show in reading and who eventually drop out of school. A Canadian Education Association sponsored Gallup Poll (1984) asked the respondents how important schools were to "one's future success" (cited in Flower, 1984: 10). The result of the poll revealed that 79 percent of the nation thought that schools were extremely important, except for Quebec. Quebec's result was below the national average. Wagner (1985) pointed out that the French population in Canada has the highest proportion of illiterates, while Statistics Canada (1999) indicated that the highest dropout rates in Quebec are within the French schools. In colonial Canada, the authorities reported to France that the habitants' children did not take naturally to learning. Pierre

Boucher, governor of Trois-Rivières said, “It is difficult to captivate them with studies” (cited in Magnuson, 1992: 78).

Economic factors impacted on schooling then as it does today (Ghosh, 1996; Porter, 1979). Children who lived in the towns and whose parents were wealthy were far more privileged to formal education than children of poor parents in the rural areas (Purdy, 1985). There were more schools in the urban centres and the wealthier citizens could afford to hire private tutors for their children. But economically disadvantaged parents (especially those in rural areas) required the cooperation of their children as contributors to the well being of the family (Lower, 1956; Porter, Porter and Blishen, 1982). So the frontier society of early Canada resisted bringing up their children as rigidly as their French counterparts (Wade, 1964). The children were needed to help with large families, chores on the farm and were put to work at an early age (Lampert, 2002). The result of a permissive form of child-rearing pattern and harsh economic realities may certainly have been contributing factors to the children’s resistance to formal learning and a learning culture (Magnuson, 1992). With regards to the attitude of parents towards schools, Livingstone and Hart (1987) have postulated that:

Public attitudes are not necessarily reflected by prevailing educational ideologies. While this is true in ideological uncertainty, the lived experiences of some people may frequently be so at odds with the dominant ideological claims as to elicit either opposed or contradictory expressions of attitudes. (p. 4)

It is quite safe to say that a “non-learning culture” impacts negatively on the notion of life long learning, which is emphasized in today’s society (Ghosh, 1987). The Canadian Government expressed its concern regarding a “non-learning culture” as a societal problem that contributes to the dropout phenomenon.

Consequently, in a draft discussion paper entitled: *Learning well...Living well*, it states:

Numerous studies have demonstrated that successful students usually come from homes and cultures where high values are placed on educational achievement... Somehow, we must develop in Canada a learning culture in which the values of education are prized for their cultural benefits and also for their impact on individual incomes and national prosperity. (1990: S – 4)

The issue of sexism in public schools today is also deeply rooted in the history of the educational development of Canadian schools (Ghosh, 1996). The distinction between the genders lay in the differentiation of sex roles in early Canada (O'Brien, 1987). In the society then, the children went to work with their parents along gender lines. The boys went to work with their fathers, while the girls worked with their mothers to help with the demanding tasks of everyday life (Magnuson, 1992). Although in their respective schools both sexes studied much of the same subject matter in – reading, writing, counting and religion - girls learning was less academic, more practical and more religious in emphasis (Purdy, 1987). Girls were instructed in the arts of cooking, sewing and weaving. Hence, the rearing and education of girls was geared towards preparing them for the duties of motherhood and household management, an idea that maintained its validity in Canadian schools (O'Brien, 1987). In general, the rule on the issue of gender was that the domain of the male was the world outside the home, and that of the female was inside the home. So boys learned the art of fishing, farming, furniture making, carpentry and animal husbandry.

Gender bias is another part of the sexist equation that resulted from the development of education in colonial Canada. For girls, even those from

distinguished families, rarely continued their education beyond adolescence. An elementary education was deemed enough to equip them with sufficient knowledge to receive first communion and assume some adult responsibilities. Magnuson (1992) states that:

In some boys school Latin was taught to those aspiring to continuing their education in the Jesuit College. Latin was not offered to girls; it was dismissed as intellectually presumptuous and unnecessary, since there was no secondary school to which they could go. (p. 76)

Uncovering sexism in education has been a major task of the women's movement in the last part of the twentieth century (O'Brien, 1987). Today, education institutions are seen as powerful mechanisms in the conservation of male power and reproduction of masculine ideology (McLaren, 1994; Ghosh, 1996; O'Brien 1987; Bennett and LeCompte, 1995).

The issue of social status and learning were deeply entrenched in the development of education in early Canada (Lessard, 1987). Having an education or simply being literate in early Canada varied according to one's place of residence, gender and socio-economic status. "It is indisputable that literacy was universal among the colony's administrative and professional classes, many of whose members had been born and educated in France and were stationed in the towns" (Magnuson, 1992: 103).

Lower (1958) points out that the members of the colony's administrative staff and the professionals were educated. These educated people were members of the ruling elite. This elite group included the governor, the attendant, the bishop, the attorney general and the councilors. Below this group were the lower clergy, judges, military officers, seigneurs, and host of lesser law and administrative

officers such as notaries, clerks of the court who also had some formal education. At the end of the socio-economic scale were the common people who were usually unable to read or write. In describing the situation after the British conquest in 1760, General Murray wrote that the inhabitants “are in general extremely ignorant” (Shortt and Doughty, Documents Relating to the Constitutional History of Canada 1759 – 1791: 79).

The members of the ruling elite classes mostly lived in the towns because in these centres were the seats of political, commercial and social life. Those who resided and worked in the urban centres were ruled by the written word. Consequently, in eighteenth century Canada, a much greater number of the population that lived in the towns knew how to read and write than those in the country. At the centre of rural life in Canada was the *habitant*, or farmer, who had no need for pens, pencil and paper. So as one left Quebec and Montreal, a different way of life asserted itself where a land-based economy paid deference to strong bodies over fine minds. The spoken word also took precedence over the written word in the country areas. From the earliest days of the colony the towns maintained boys’ and girls’ schools that were well attended. On the other hand, few rural areas had a school or a teacher (Wade, 1964).

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Quebec, there was a strong correlation between social class and the number and types of books that people owned (Wade, 1964). The members of the ruling and professional classes had more books in their possession. The collection of their books reflected a broad range of interests, from religion, law and history to the arts and sciences. In

contrast, the lower classes had far fewer books in their possession. However, the books that the lower classes possessed were invariably of a religious nature, which suggests that reading was an affair of the elite (Magnuson, 1992). Even today in Quebec, people who are illiterate and can't afford books consider them to be a luxury. The director for the Centre of Literacy in Quebec commented on this issue as she said:

It may seem odd, in a wealthy society so many people consider books a luxury and never have the funds to buy them – A society where we are so hooked on cyberspace, there are so many people clamouring for books and regarding them as a privilege. (Shohet, 2003: A7)

Today, much credence is given to the impact of one's socio-economic status on learning in school and school success. As such, some sociologists in education have examined the issue of high school dropout by focusing on the social and economic status of the students' parents (Persell, 1977; McLaren, 1994; Bennett and LeCompte, 1995). The relationship between school success and the socio-economic status of the students' parents were explored in the literature review in Chapter two of this thesis. The substance of that discussion is embodied in the sociological belief of conflict, critical and interpretive theorists that the social and economic status of the students' parents are intricately intertwined with school outcomes.

3.1.2 Education in Contemporary Canada and Quebec (1760 – 2000)

The British conquest of the French in Quebec in 1760 had profound impact on the educational development of the young colony (Wade, 1964). The position of the French Canadians were desperate because they were separated from the

mother country on whom they were utterly dependent. France had supplied rulers, missionaries, educators, ideas and books to the new colony but now the British conquest had completely isolated the settlers. In this situation the Roman Catholic Church - being the only French institution in the colony, assumed further responsible for providing social and educational services for the habitant (Lower, 1977). As such, the Roman Catholic Church was the unchallenged authority of education in Quebec then (Magnuson, 1992).

In the nineteenth century - during the years following the British conquest, the Roman Catholic Church faced a competitor and rival with its work in Lower Canada (as Quebec was then called). The Protestant Church of the British conquerors had vested interest in the institutions for social and educational development in Quebec – thus came about a dualism in education between Catholicism and Protestantism. This dualism has characterized the education system of Quebec to the late 20th century (Henchey and Burgess, 1987; Purdy, 1987).

Some attempts were made to combine the two groups to form a centralized system (Purdy, 1987). Purdy (1987) points out that a centralized system was proposed because there was a desire to build a cohesive society in which all citizens would share a common set of values, attitudes and institutions. But these various attempts failed because the Roman Catholics who had started their educational ventures to assimilate the Indians now feared that they would be assimilated and controlled by the English-speaking Protestants. Therefore, the Roman Catholic Church resisted all efforts to have a unified school system. It became virtually

impossible to devise a workable educational solution for the unification of the religious, linguistic and cultural divide that existed in Upper and Lower Canada. School laws that were proposed were usually suitable for one province but not for the other.

However, following a crisis of the 1830's, Quebec was united with Upper Canada (as Ontario was then called) in 1841 (Moir, 1967). Then an Education Act was designed in 1845 to serve the two - but distinctly different parts of Canada. The structures of this law formed the basis of the British North America Act in 1867 – where many of its provisions are still in use today (Purdy, 1987). The British North America Act and its relation to education in Canada today will be discussed later this chapter.

Henchey and Burgess (1987) noted that in Canada, the Catholic and the Protestant school organizations for the most part acted independently of each other structurally. One of the major differences in structure was that the Protestant system provided secondary education in public schools. Contrary to the Protestants' position, secondary education in the Catholic system was almost exclusively provided by the private sector. The clergy and religious orders in the classical colleges were the primary operators of these private schools.

This situation existed in Quebec until the period of the Quiet Revolution in the 1960's. Needless to say, the poor children of French farmers (who were the majority of the Quebec population) were unable to afford schooling at the secondary level. Consequently, the issue of inaccessibility to schooling facilities continued to be problematic for many children in Quebec. However, in Ontario the

situation was reversed because Protestants were in charge of education in that province. Secondary schooling was public for a largely Protestant population (Purdy, 1987). Therefore, accessibility of education in Ontario was not an issue.

To supplement their public and primary schools, the future Canadian provinces began opening tax-supported high schools as early as the 1850s. During that period slaves from the South found refuge in Ontario. Unlike the habitant in Quebec who lived nomadic lives, the former slaves built communities and clamoured to have schools for their children (Hill, 1981). Immigrant farmers from Europe also advocated for schools, so education was made available to boys and girls alike (Lower, 1977).

But the attitude of born Canadians towards education continued to be ambivalent (Wade, 1964). Most were satisfied if their children learned rudimentary reading, writing and arithmetic. This was regarded as only natural, since their labour was still only needed to sustain their families in a society of scrub farms, lumber camps, fishing villages, and basic small towns. With an economy based on natural resources, Canada remained essentially a frontier society until well into the twentieth century (Ghosh 1996). It gradually became industrialized, but the old fashioned view of school prevailed (Lower, 1958). As recently as the 1950's - when Canada moved into the period of modernity, well over half the men in the Canadian labour force had never gone beyond elementary school (Purdy, 1987). Only a third had attended high school and lower than 10 percent had gone to a college or university (Lower, 1977). The educational shortcomings at the time

appeared to have been masked because up to the 1960's immigrants were used to fill much of the need for skilled and professional workers (Porter, 1979).

The structure of education in Canada now boasts a cohesive school system. From the early nineteenth century there was a paradigm shift from schooling for religious conversion to schooling for social and economic purposes (Ghosh, 1996). Yet many Canadians were getting along very well without completing their high school studies (Lower, 1977). On a personal level, it was still possible for bright young people who had dropped out of school to live a prosperous life. Although voices were raised in calling attention to this problem (For example, Neatby, 1953), the calls were generally ignored. Canadians were able to learn on the job from older colleagues in a formal or informal apprenticeship (Davis and Guppy, 1998). At that time, a clear line was drawn between training and education. A person did not have to acquire a lot of formal education or school learning to be trained (Lower, 1977). Even when more sophisticated equipment and techniques were introduced in the period of the industrial revolution, the worker could be taught to use them with a minimum amount of formal instruction or written material. Few imagined that their jobs might one day become obsolete, and that an educational background would be the prerequisite for retraining to do something new (Lower, 1977). Clearly, by the 1960's there existed a need for at least a high school diploma for entry into the workforce and for academic self-actualization, but this did not stop students from dropping out of high school at an alarming rate (Davis and Guppy, 1998).

The Canadian sociologist John Porter (1967) again raised the alarm of the technical, scientific and social problems that can exist in a highly advanced industrial society if that society does not utilize its human resources to the maximum. Thereby he advocated the human capital theory. Human capital theory advanced the notion of education as a social investment, rather than simply an agent for personal development (Schultz, 1961). With the advent of advanced technology, workers at all levels are required to work more with words and numbers than with physical objects and often to understand the intellectual concepts behind the tasks that they are performing. Therefore, for the economic good of society it is perceived to be of paramount importance for students to stay in school and complete their programs (Schultz, 1961).

During the 1960s and 1970s, many research studies were done in Canada and USA to examine the problem of the high school dropout rate (Bélanger, 1970; Cervantes, 1965; Coleman, 1966; Hicks, 1969; Bachman, 1972; Kaplan and Luck, 1977). In Quebec Bélanger's studies of dropouts in the early sixties indicated that:

The most favoured children from the point of view of staying in school, were those who lived in urban area, who had limited numbers of brothers and sisters, and whose fathers were professionals drawing salaries which permitted them to have large well-furnished dwellings, and whose mothers were at home. The least favoured children of the province were the children of farmers of little education, in areas of low farm income, and with large families. (Cited in Porter, 1965:88)

Other studies confirmed the findings of Bélanger's work which revealed studies that the public school system appeared to have little impact and influence on the less privileged social classes both in terms of access to educational services and positive results (Lessard, 1987). Within this context the theory of reproduction (Which views schools as agencies reproducing existing social classes and basic

social hierarchies) was developed (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Consequently, education reforms were instituted at that time. Emphasis was placed on compensatory education with a view to remedying the ills of the public school system that was built on middle class values (Lessard, 1987). The primary objective of compensatory education was to enable children from low socio-economic status to obtain educational performances comparable to that of children from middle and upper classes (Coleman, 1966). Child-centered education was also emphasized to promote confidence in children (Hall-Dennis, 1968).

As mentioned above, the reforms of 1960's in Quebec are generally referred to as the Quiet Revolution. This revolution affected virtually every aspect of Quebec's society which brought "it more in line with the realities of a modern industrial state" (Henchey and Burgess, 1987: 27). The theory of modernization that emerged in the 1950s continued to regard change in Canada and Quebec as a dramatic and complex shift from traditional to a modern state. As such, emphasis was placed on modern attitude and values. To achieve this, education and the process of socialization were viewed as significant in developing values that were conducive to modernization (Porter, 1965). During that period in Quebec, its education system also underwent major reforms. These reforms were aimed at offering Quebecers a chance to improve their lives by becoming better-educated (Parent Reports, 1966). Reports show that some measure of success was achieved (Henchey and Burgess, 1987). Henchey and Burgess noted that through the reform efforts of the time, the system was modernized and made more democratic; and that free education was made to all children irrespective of their economic or social

background. They argued that the reform was one of expansion (especially – in the rural areas) that was necessary in part to accommodate the postwar baby boom.

Although these measures of expansions and curricula changes that were put together by governments remedied serious deficiencies in the education system to a certain extent, inherent in them were causes of future problems. Some of the problems highlighted, were the impersonal nature of large schools (this is in contrast to small local schools where virtually everyone was known to each other in the rural areas), the system of electives, options, subject promotion, streaming or tracking, and teacher expectation (Henchey and Burgess, 1987).

At the close of the 1970s and into the 1980s, the general public was disenchanted with the education system that existed in Quebec and throughout Canada (Illich, 1970; Holt, 1970; Lind, 1972, Weisler, 1972). People continued to be very critical of the system. This led the Minister of Education in Quebec, Mr. Jacques-Yves Morin, in 1977 to state:

Over the past fifteen years the population has resolutely attempted to improve its schools. Considerable sums of money have been devoted to the opening of the education system to the greatest number of pupils, particularly at the secondary level. Quebecers wanted to modernize both programs and methods so that young people may be better prepared for life in contemporary society. Why do all these efforts appear to have achieved so few results? (*Green Paper*, p. 9)

As a response to the various criticisms that were levied at the school system, efforts were again made to confront the dropout problem and improve the school situation throughout Canada. The Quebec Minister of Education (1977) responded to the mounting criticisms by releasing a Green Paper entitled, *Primary and secondary education in Quebec*. The intent of the Green Paper was to provide discussion on the pedagogical and administrative problems that faced the school

system rather than offer solutions. Results of the consultative process were presented in a policy statement entitled, *Schools of Quebec: Policy statement and Plan of Action* (1979).

The proposals contained in the Plan of Action (1979) were concerned with the improvement of pedagogy, as well as the organization and structures of schools. To this end, more high school students would be encouraged to complete the program. From this Policy Statement, numerous plans including: parent involvement, new courses of study, new teaching guides throughout the curriculum and more precise criteria for evaluation for school-leaving certification were implemented throughout the 1980s. In addition, streaming of students into different courses was to be abolished, and children with learning or physical disabilities were to be integrated (mainstreamed) into regular classes as much as possible. However, the matter of students' involvement in their learning was never addressed in all these reform measures.

While in Ontario, Radwanski (1987) was mandated "to identify and recommend ways of ensuring that Ontario's education is, and is perceived to be fully relevant to the needs of young people, and to the realities of the labour market they are preparing to enter with particular emphasis on the dropout issue" (p. ii). The results of that investigation was labeled the Radwanski Report (1987). The report advocated the adoption of a traditional form of common-core curriculum predicated on mastery learning principles. It also suggested that the Ontario Ministry of Education should take responsibility for the prescription of the curriculum content. The Ministry would also administer a new standardized

province-wide testing program. The spiral curriculum - in use at the time - would be purged from all elementary schools and the credit system would be abolished in high schools. Only a limited number of optional courses would be retained in the highest grades. Like Quebec, streaming would be abolished.

The provision of what Radwanski views as a solid, sensible and sequential curriculum could itself, he argued, help to reduce the incidence of the high school dropout by restoring coherence, purpose and of course, relevance to the high schools. Nonetheless, he urged that the dropout problem be directly addressed through programs designed to monitor the progress and situation of individual high school students together with much improved systems of counseling and mentoring. Here again, the Radwanski Report (1987) offered some worthwhile suggestions, but still omitted any demonstration of student's involvement in their learning.

Other provinces had their share of problems too and introduced plans of action to reduce the high school dropout rate (Lessard, 1987). However, the plans that were implemented in Quebec and the other provinces were unsuitable to meet the needs of a large percentage of high school students (Coleman and LaRocque, 1987). So in the late 1980s, the federal government and the provincial authorities were frustrated with the failures of the school systems and their inability to reduce the rate of the high school dropouts (Canadian Chamber of Commerce, 1989).

In 1989, the Prime Minister of Canada – Mr. Brian Mulroney, expressed the notion that there was a need for a comprehensive review of the education system in Canada (Chamber of Commerce, 1989). As a response to this dilemma, all ten

provinces and two territories (that existed at that time) appointed committees or commissions to review curriculum and teaching methods of elementary and high schools under their jurisdiction. Pennell (1993) argued that while the findings of the various task forces were conflicting in many areas, there was a consensus on one important factor. The consensus centered on the factor that - too many high school students are either drifting through schools without being able to read or write properly, or they are dropping out of high school. From the review, Statistics Canada (1990) indicated that the average dropout rate across the country was 29 percent. Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec had the highest dropout rate between 35 and 36 percent.

The priorities expressed in the policies and goals of the Department of Education of each province were to reduce the dropout rate in high schools. Again, various reforms were launched nation-wide in the early 1990s to combat this problem. In this reform venture, some provinces chose to concentrate their efforts on “back to basics” while others chose to focus on the more liberal child-centered educational policies. Despite the national and provincial efforts to stem the tide of the students leaving school prematurely, no effective remedy was found as is evidenced by the consistent problem of high rates of school dropouts.

In 1992, the schools of Quebec again became the object of concern as the high school dropout rate was among the highest at 35 percent in Canada. This prompted Mr. Pagé (the minister of education in Quebec then) to say:

Concern over the prospect of our youth has been heard from many different quarters. We share this concern and will make every effort to adopt innovative, dynamic measures which we hope will keep students in school. (1992: 1)

In a response to this concern, Mr. Pagé published a *Plan of action on educational success* in 1992, and submitted a budget of 42 million dollars earmarked for measures to be implemented in the Plan's first year towards increasing high school graduation rate to 80 percent in five years. Unfortunately, this Plan of action failed too. Two years after its implementation, the rate of students dropping out of Quebec schools rose to 40 percent.

3.1.3 High school dropout phenomenon: Sounding the alarm today

The high school drop out phenomenon continues to alarm people from various sectors of the population. For example, community leaders, members of the business community, educators, parents and provincial governments have all expressed their concern regarding the high school dropout problem. This has led Anderson (1991) to state that although Canada spent 6.8 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on education (one of the highest in the industrialized world – second only to Sweden), solving the problem of high school dropout is a major failure of the Canadian educational system. As reported in the Education Indicators (1994) a substantial increase was made on education expenditure then. The Canadian expenditure on education was increased to 8.1 percent of its GDP with the primary intent to increase the high school graduation rate from 65 percent to 80 percent by 1997. In actual cost, Canada spends almost \$59 billion on education and more than \$36 billion of that total go towards elementary and secondary education (Education Indicators, 1999). Needless to say, the interventions that were put in place with that money were certainly ineffective, because we are now in the academic year 2002-2003 and the problem still exists.

The Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal in Quebec forcefully articulated the need to address the high school dropout phenomenon here in 1992, 1998, 1999, and again in 2000. The March 15th (1992) issue of *L'Actualité* featured an article on the dropout problem by Dominique Demers. In this article, the statement was made that since 1986 the dropout rate in Quebec had increased from 27 percent (the North American average) to 36 percent (the highest in the Western world), while the average in Canada was 28 percent. In a 1993 study commissioned by the Montreal School Council Foundation, researchers reported that the dropout rate in some high schools on the Island of Montreal was as high as 60 percent.

It is no wonder that the latest Estates General on Education in Quebec (1995-1996) also emphasized that high school dropout rate is “a serious problem”. In January 1999, Céline Saint-Pierre (President of the Advisory Council on Education) echoed similar concerns in a press conference, stating that “the failure rate in Quebec is unacceptably high” (*The Gazette, Montreal*, 1999, p. A1). Consequently, for the academic year 2001-2002, the Quebec Government has allocated \$400 000 a year to six public schools with an average drop out rate of 41 percent. This amount is to be extended over a three-year period. The aim of this stay-in-school initiative is to reduce the dropout rate to 26 percent by the year 2004. To emphasize the gravity of the problem the former Quebec Education Minister – François Legault visited two of the six selected schools in October 2001 and encouraged the students to stay in school (*The Gazette, Montreal*, 2001, p. A3).

In this brief account of the educational development in Canada and Quebec,

the factors of race, culture and social class are some of the issues that emerged from the review. There appears to be a correlation between these issues of the past and present with regards to the high school dropout phenomenon. As such, (mostly in the twentieth century) sociologists in education have examined some of the above issues with the intent to improve the rate of high school dropout.

In Chapter four of this thesis, the views of some sociologists regarding school structure, economic and social standing, culture and gender - in relationship to school success will be discussed. The varying views of sociological theories in education as they relate to the issues of school success and high school dropout are fundamental to the analysis of this research. Today, the concerns regarding the high school dropout problem continues to grow and efforts to stem the flow are intensified; but as of yet the matter of students' voice being heard and involvement in their learning have not been addressed. Therefore, this project focuses on listening to the students' views on learning in school.

3.1.4 Education in Canada and Quebec today

As mentioned previously, after the failure of the 1841 Education Act, Quebec began to develop its own distinctive system of education. Owing to the differences in demography, settlement patterns and the religious composition of the population, a very different education solution was devised. Although the English Protestants were a minority in Quebec, they were economically and politically powerful. But both the Catholics and Protestant clerics were determined to secure their own schools. As a result, a solution was formulated in The British North America Act

of 1867, which embodied the laws passed in 1845 and 1846 (Wilson et al., 1970, pp. 172 – 175). This new law gave the two principal Christian divisions their own schools, and established what became known as the dual confessional system in Quebec. Shortly thereafter, the Protestants began to create a school system similar to that of Ontario – including the right to receive funding for both elementary and secondary schools. But the Catholics emerged from this arrangement with a system comparable to that of France, which assumed that very few students would attend high school. Therefore, public funding was not made available for high school students in Quebec. The two systems existed in virtual isolation from each other until the education expansion and sweeping reforms of the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s (Wilson et al., 1970, pp. 175 – 181).

Section 93 of The British North America Act of 1867 (now the Constitution Act of 1867) allows for each province to hold exclusive jurisdiction over its own educational practices (Purdy, 1987). One very important proviso was included in the constitution to protect religious groups that had established their own schools in Ontario and Quebec (Purdy, 1987). As a result, Protestant and Catholic schools are entrenched in the constitution. However, in 1998 Quebec relinquished this clause of denominational protection in the constitution and instead opted for education along linguistics lines. The boards of the public schools in Quebec are now transformed from Protestant and Catholic to English and French school boards.

Canada's education system now encompasses a mix of almost 16 000 elementary and secondary schools, and about 300 colleges and universities

(Statistics Canada, 1995). Although education is reserved for the provinces, the federal presence in Canadian education has grown beyond specific federal responsibilities (Council of Ministers of Education, 1975). As such, it has intervened in the areas of: post secondary education and research, vocational training, equalization financing, media communication, multicultural education and bilingual education. Despite these interventions, the center of educational control rests clearly at the provincial level (Lawson and Woock, 1987). Subsequently, Canada has 13 educational systems – each unique in it self. There are ten provinces, two Territories, and the newly established system of Nunavut (*Canada Year Book*, 1999). But in spite of these differences, there is a basic structure that binds all the systems into the Canadian educational system.

For the most part, a significant amount of Canadian youths spend a great part of their lives in one or more of these schools, but mostly their learning experiences take place in institutions called public schools. Public schools are run by local educational authorities and governed by provincial legislation (*Canada Year Book*, 1999). Most provinces offer non-compulsory kindergarten programs to prepare four and five year olds for Grade 1. Elementary education spans from Grade 1 to Grades 6, 7, or 8, depending on the jurisdiction. At the end of the elementary school period, children automatically move on to secondary or high school. There are no tests or entrance exams for admittance to public high schools, but there are a few exceptions to this rule in Quebec. In an age specific and grade specific school system, teachers are frequently inclined to recommend grade retention for some students who fail (Livingstone and Hart, 1987). Research on grade retention

(Goldschmidt and Wang, 1999) has indicated that students who repeat grades in the elementary school are usually at-risk of dropping out of high school. As such, school administrators and teachers are warned against using grade retention as an intervention to achieve school success (Penna, 2002).

In some parts of Canada, high school is divided into two levels. For example, in Ontario Grades 7 to 9 constitute the intermediate or junior level, and Grades 10 to 12, the senior level. While in Quebec, high school ends at Grade 11 and students who want to continue their studies at the university level, must obtain a diploma from Collège d'Enseignement Général et Professionnel (CÉGEP). In Ontario, students must take additional Ontario Academic Credit (OAC) courses beyond Grade 12 to be admitted to university (*Canada Year Book*, 1999).

3.1.5 Official requirements for school success in Quebec's high schools

In 1982, the basic regulations for secondary education in Quebec was changed, thus making school success for all students in Quebec more difficult to achieve (Ministère de l'Éducation, 1991). The present regulation demands that all students follow the same programs in language of instruction, second language, and social studies throughout secondary school, and the same programs in science and mathematics up to the Grade 9 level. The credits accumulated to this level are not taken into consideration for graduation purposes. All students must accumulate a minimum of 54 units of credits between Grade 10 and Grade 11, and must obtain a passing grade of 60 percent instead of 50 percent in each subject in order to graduate.

The entrance requirements for vocational programs were also raised. Students wishing to enter any vocational program must obtain Grade 9 credits in all basic subjects, and grade 10 credits in the basic subjects to be admitted to a program leading to the Secondary School Diploma (Ministère de l'Éducation, 1991). But while some at the Ministry level may argue that these requirements have improved the quality of education, there is a growing concern among teachers that they are too demanding for some students who are unable to meet these standards. Hence, it has contributed to more students falling behind and dropping out of school (Teacher interviewed for this project, 1999).

3.1.6 School boards

Local school boards have been an integral part of the Canadian educational system for some time now. For the most part, school boards are made up of elected community members with powers delegated by the province. The primary role of school boards is to hire teachers and other staff, and to provide school facilities and supplies. The boards share authority with the province over such matters as curriculum, textbook selections and courses of study (Lawson and Woock, 1987: 137).

In most provinces, school boards are allowed to tax local citizens to supplement provincial funding for education. The school boards in the public school system in Canada include those that are organized along religious, or linguistic lines, or both. But the roles of the school boards are changing. Provincial governments are taking more control over their respective education

systems, and the number of boards is reducing. For example, Alberta recently reduced the number of its school boards from 181 to 57. While concurrently, New Brunswick dissolved its boards and replaced them with a system of parent-led committees, councils and boards. In 1998, Ontario reduced its 127 school boards to 72. In Quebec, the Minister of Education tabled legislation (Bill 109) to restructure its school boards. The objectives were twofold. First, as mentioned above the Protestant and Catholic school boards that existed were transformed into English and French boards, and second, the number of school boards were reduced from 153 to 69 (*Toward Linguistic School Boards*, 1997). Governing Boards have now replaced Orientation Committees in each public school in Quebec (*Giving Schools More Autonomy*, 1998).

3.2 RESPECTING DIFFERENCES IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

In Chapter two of this dissertation, some theoretical approaches to the drop out phenomenon were reviewed. In that chapter the incongruence of some students' human and cultural capital with that of the school emerged as the overriding factors that impact on school achievement. However, public schools in Canada are mandated to provide adequate education for all students. Canada does not only offer compulsory primary and secondary education to children and youths to the age of 16, but it also prides itself as a multicultural country. As such, its education system must provide schooling for a wide and diverse population. Ken Dryden (1995) writes:

The public high school stretches across neighbourhoods, puts kids into the same box, and lets them loose for six and a half-hours a day for most of a year, year after

year. If Canada is an experiment in multiculturalism, then the public high school is its crucible. (p. 15)

One can safely assume that providing adequate education is not an easy task by any means because of the diversity of the population in each school. "The provision of adequate education for such a diverse population is at best challenging" (Dei et. al, 1997). But if students are to be well served educationally, multiculturalism in schools must stress respect for all differences in cultural values, behaviours, ways of learning, and socio-cultural practices (Ghosh, 1996). This view suggests that differences should be valued if more students are to be successful in the public school system. How school success is interpreted according to race, religion, abilities, social and economic standing are very important factors in this equation. Consequently, there are different interpretations of the meaning of success in schools within the school culture. The call then, is for an education that respects individual differences, as well as collective and historical experiences of all students.

The public school system emphasizes "success" in terms of high academic achievement. The general view of society and the philosophy of the public school system suggest that students who are successful in school will have (in terms of good jobs and good positions) upward mobility in the society. Although some high school students embrace the view that possessing a high school certificate is tantamount to having a passport to upward mobility, they also suggest that while they are in school their place in society is already assigned. They perceive schools as imposing rules and values on them that are outside of their experiences and interests (Deyhle and Swisher, 1997; McLaren, 1994; Rist, 1970; Wilson, 1991).

So, they choose not to conform to the “accepted norms and values”, since they feel that the place assigned to them in society is at the lower end of the spectrum - no matter what they do. From their point of view, the school’s expectations of them are incongruent with their experiences, interests, and expectations of themselves. Hence, the school has not adequately provided for them.

One Grade 10 student from MIND (Moving In New Directions) said that, “The education system failed us. We didn’t fail it” (Valry Haines, cited in *The Gazette, Montreal*, April 29, 1999, p. A6). MIND is an alternative high school in the English Montreal School Board. This school offers students who are at risk of dropping out, the opportunity to learn in an environment that is different from that of regular public schools. In MIND, students are allowed to express their creativity in a non-threatening climate. To some of the students in MIND, success means being free to dress the way they want to, to be able to make films, to form music bands, to write novels or poetry, but most of all to be free and uninhibited in their own creative expressions. It is interesting to note that “between 80 to 90 percent of students from MIND go on to college and university, and only two percent dropout” (*The Gazette, Montreal*, April 1999:A 6). Had these students continued in the monolithic school system most of them might not have experienced school success. The students at MIND feel that they are misunderstood in the regular schools, so they “take refuge from the cliques of regular high schools, from the rule book and detention room” and leave. (*The Gazette, Montreal*, April 29, 1999: A 6). It is most unfortunate that in October 2001, the English Montreal School Board has

decided to close this school because of financial constraints. The board has decided that it can no longer afford to keep such a school opened.

It is my view that when schools are unable to satisfy students' need to be creative and actively involved in planning what they should learn and how they learn, the potential exists for them to experience failure in school. Yvonne Zacharias (1999), an education reporter for *The Gazette, Montreal* writes, "Give kids freedom to be themselves. They will blossom. You'll see" (April, 23: 1). It is my belief also that education must be able to equip every student with the tools to think critically and to solve daily problems. However, if students perceive the education they receive as irrelevant to their daily lives and experiences, "then such an education cannot be considered part of a social and political project to transform society" (Dei et al., 1997:6).

It seems that the school system that was formulated to sort and select students on high academic performance and neglected the arts and creative abilities have now found the result of that system very troubling. Henchey (2000) suggests that whereas Latin was previously used as a sorting device in public schools, it is now replaced by advance courses in mathematics. "Advanced mathematics courses stand for rigour, precision and status, their tests are high stakes-affairs and they are widely used as an index of competence not only for mathematics-based programs but also as a proxy for brains and industriousness" (cited in *The Gazette, Montreal* June 4, 2000: 8). Society is now reeling from the effects of a supposedly sound educational system. For the intent of the system has been achieved in successfully sorting out those students who do not belong academically and socially, and

selecting those who do. Henchey (2000) expresses the notion that schools are very close to sorting students into two categories – those with advanced mathematics qualification for pure and applied science programs, “and everyone else – the dysfunctional” (p. 8). Eisner (1993) expresses his thoughts this way:

By selectively emphasizing some forms of representation over others, schools shape children’s thinking skills and in the process privilege some students and handicap others by the virtue of the congruence between their aptitudes and the opportunities to use them in school. In this sense the school is profoundly political. (p. 7)

In the early part of 1999, a conference was held by the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) to discuss the impact of the present curriculum reform on pedagogy. At this conference, one teacher expressed her dismay at the contradictory notion of school success that exists within the public school system. She stated that, “Society tells us that everything has value, yet stigma is attached to everything other than academics.” Therefore, said she, “a lot of students are not being served in areas that are not valued. For example, the cultural content is being dismissed. Teachers are saying that students are part of society, yet drama is devalued. Consensus is that our value is very skewed” (teacher at EMSB conference, March 1999). It seems then, that schools have continued to define success as being solely academic.

Important questions are beginning to be asked about the role of mathematics in high schools, the extent to which it is driving programs and the implications for all students (Henchey, 2000). With regards to respecting differences in students, Howard Gardner (1982, 1983) posits that there are at least seven forms of intelligence and schools should help to cultivate them, instead of invalidating them.

Gardner (1983) speaks of kinds of intelligence such as linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal and intrapersonal. From his research, Gardner (1983) informs us that linguistic intelligence is related to one's ability to use words well. Logical-mathematical intelligence is one's ability to use numbers. Spatial intelligence relates to having the capacity to perceive the physical world accurately and imaginatively. Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence suggests having the ability to use the body to express feelings and perform skilled physical acts. The intelligence of music relates to one's ability to appreciate and express musical forms. Interpersonal intelligence is having the ability to relate positively to other people, while intrapersonal intelligence deals with being able to know one's self and being reflexive.

From this perspective, it is quite reasonable to suggest then that most students are "more intelligent" in some of these areas than others are. Therefore, it should be the role of the school to help all students explore these different forms of intelligence and to give them the opportunity to demonstrate their level of competence in each. Noddings (1992) agrees with Gardner's (1983) view of multiple intelligence. She states that the public school system has a moral obligation to recognize the multiplicity of human capacities and interests. "Instead of preparing everyone for college in the name of democracy and equality of opportunity, schools should be instilling in students a respect for all forms of honest work done well," says Noddings (1992:xiv). In an interview with *Time Magazine* (1990), William Brock, the former secretary of labour in USA said:

We have put our emphasis on the college bound, who are 30% of our young people. We have the finest university system. We have public education at the elementary

and secondary level that ranks below every industrial competitor we have in the world. Everybody knows what it takes to get into college. Has anybody ever told a teacher what it takes to be productive if you don't go to college? We are the only country in the industrial world that says to one out of every four of its young people, "We are going to let you drop out of sight; we are not going to give you the tools to be productive." No wonder they drop out, because the market signal says to them, we don't care about you. (Pp. 12, 14)

This suggests that the public school system needs to welcome, acknowledge, but most of all cultivate and encourage the many forms of intelligence that exist in students. This is of paramount importance if schools are to stem the tide of annual dropouts and provide the rich mix of graduates that are necessary for our society. The recognition and cultivation of multiple intelligence that should exist is also important if the school system is to reconcile its goal of inclusion and by the same token, intellectual rigour.

In Chapter two of this dissertation, the literature review focused on the problem of high school dropout by examining programs that ignored students' voices and some sociological views of who drop out of high school and why these students drop out. But, the intent of the study is to listen to students who are at risk of dropping out of high school. In this study, I listened to some of these students and heard their views of school success and their views about their needs to achieve this type of success. The students' perception and views are theirs and as such are not called into question. However, for the purpose of analyzing the students' views within the framework of a combination of theories in education, it is important to examine some sociological perspectives of school success. The following chapter explores the major educational theories, and sets the framework for an analysis of school success that is grounded in a combination of educational theories.

CHAPTER 4

DEFINING SCHOOL SUCCESS: SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

For decades, educational sociologists have been concerned with the meaning of school success, and how children arrive at being successful. Researchers and philosophers in the field of education have offered many views regarding the topic of school success. For example, in Cornford's (1975) translation of *The Republic*, success for Plato is the development of the whole human being in physical, moral and mental excellence. Success for Rousseau (1911) in *Emile*, is Emile's ability to survive and flourish and not to be contaminated by the society. Dewey (1956) perceives success, as the development of each child's full potential in habits of doing, thinking and feeling. The result of children's maximum development of the above mentioned habits sets the stage for each to lead a productive life as an adult. While Freire (1970), in teaching oppressed Brazilian peasants, viewed success as the liberation of one's mind, the ability to think critically and act in a rational as well as in a compassionate manner. On a whole, the meanings of school success that have been suggested by the above thinkers are basically rooted in a humanistic education program. This would result in the positive shaping of children's and adults' mind and well being, in order to think critically and make responsible decisions independently. However, Dewey (1956) reminds us that society's influence on school success should not be underestimated.

People experience success and failure in every aspect of life and the experience in school is no different. But because of society's influence on school,

the rate of success appears to be skewed in favour of one group as opposed to another. This creates a problem in the developmental process of some students. For example, students from upper and middle class homes as a rule are far more successful in school than their counterparts from poor and minority families (Persell, 1977; McLaren, 1994; Bowles and Gintis, 1976). Skewed rate of success has been a phenomenon for some time in most industrialized nations of the world (Persell, 1977). This has led sociologists to examine areas of this problem, and from these areas of research, many theories have been developed with a view to ameliorate the failures within the school system and to benefit the society at large.

Educational sociologists who examine the issue of school success usually explore this issue within three broad frames of reference that specifically relate to students. These frames of references are students' home environment, students' attributes, and the school environment (Persell, 1977). In examining the area of home environment, researchers have focused on issues of the family, such as the make up, educational background, level of income, and status in the society. Students' attributes include race, gender, ethnic background, social class, cultural accumulation, cultural deficit, and I.Q; and in the school environment, focus has been placed on the function of the school, the structure and administration of the school, curriculum and methods, and the role of the teacher.

The following section of this chapter is divided into four parts. The first part gives an overview of the major theories in the sociology of education and explains the purpose of the chapter. The second part explores the views of functionalist theory as a model for transmission of knowledge and culture to

members of the society. The third part examines conflict theory and then moves the discussion towards the broader frame of reproduction theories (i.e., economic, cultural and hegemonic) within the conflict approach and transformation theories of the interpretive approach. The fourth part focuses the discussion on critical theory.

4.1 THEORIES IN SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION

4.1.1 An overview

The sociology of education is an important forum for investigating what goes on in school (Gerlach, 1996). Investigations are carried out to explain the relationships that exist between educational systems and the broader society, and to examine how these relationships impact on the experiences students encounter in schools (Mifflen & Mifflen, 1982). These experiences in school ultimately decide students' success, failure and life chances (McNeal, 1997). Therefore, sociologists of education focus on the institution of education and the structure, and interaction patterns within (Woods, 1983). For example, the relationship between gender, class or race and educational achievement, or the preparation of students for the work force, or political roles are studied in order to convey an understanding of the workings and process of our society (Bennett and LeCompte, 1995).

From the results of these investigations, theories are formulated as a framework for the explanation of the functions that schools perform both for the students and the society at large (Gall, Borg and Gall, 1996). Theoretical approaches to education are, "loosely interrelated sets of assumptions, "concepts

and propositions that constitute a world view” (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984: 37). But in education, sociological theories are concerned with the intergenerational transmission of inequality, that is differential or preferential access to whatever is of value in society with particular reference to the institution of education (Crowl, 1993). However, these theories or sociological perspectives are “never universally correct” (Spencer, 1979), but Carlton, Coolly & Mackinnon (1977) suggest that although there is diversity within the discipline, there is a general consensus on the “process of learning”, and the way people are viewed.

Murphy (1979) places the body of theories into three broad models. The approaches are functionalist, interpretive and conflict theories. The primary concern of all the major theoretical approaches in the sociology of educational arena involves socialization (Bennett and LeCompte, 1990). Avison and Kunkel (1991) suggest that socialization refers to factors, such as the acquisition and acceptance of the ideas, beliefs, behaviours, roles, motives, and thought patterns of a particular culture - and various subcultures at a certain time in history. It is believed to be the process through which members of society are prepared for their different roles (Parsons, 1959). Socialization is viewed as having two broad themes, vis-à-vis, transmission in the functionalist perspective and reproduction in conflict theory. Many researchers from both orientations have offered different views on how these processes impact on school outcomes (Parsons, 1959; Merton, 1967; Turner, 1978; McLaren, 1994; Persell, 1977; Deyhle and Swisher, 1997; Keddie, 1971). Hence, their differences in perspectives as to what constitute school success and how school success is achieved.

Bennett and LeCompte (1990) define social transmission as, “the process by which a society’s ways of life, values, beliefs and norms, or standards for appropriate behaviour are transmitted from one generation to the next” (p. 4). The social transmission framework that is examined in the following two sections of this thesis are functionalist and conflict theories. Bennett and LeCompte (1990) suggest that there are many variations of the functionalist and conflict approaches, and many of them overlap, and borrow heavily from each other. It is therefore, sometimes difficult to make clear distinctions between these two perspectives. But it is worth noting that although differences exist between them, there are also similarities among them (Mifflen & Mifflen, 1982). For example, sociologists who adhere to functionalist theory and those who adhere to conflict theory share a common view in the importance of the socialization process in formal educational systems (Parsons, 1959; Merton, 1967; Persell, 1977). However, the point of departure for the proponents of either model, is at the result of the process which determines students’ life chances (Bernstein, 1977). Socialization as it is related to the structure of society (which includes institutions such as schools) will be further discussed in the section below on functionalism.

Traditionally, sociologists in education within the functionalist approach, view social transmission as a vehicle through which each generation passes on to each succeeding generation the rules and regulation, habits and appropriate behaviours for operating in the society (Bennett and LeCompte, 1990). In other words, the society reproduces itself. The task of individuals therefore, is to learn and accept their roles within society. Mifflen and Mifflen (1982) refer to the

organization of social roles which people assume within society as the social structure. Central to the theories of transmission is how existing social structures facilitate the general functioning of society (Parsons, 1951, 1959; Weber, 1947).

In contrast to functionalist and conflict theories, is the view of social transformation. Burtonwood (1986) suggests that social transformation theory is less static than the transmission perspective. Central to social transformation theory is reproduction theory, which is the active role of individuals. Proponents of this theory (Gramsci, 1971; Giroux, 1992; McLaren, 1994) view individuals as having the capacity to become “empowered,” or engaged in critical thinking which permits them to identify oppressive forces that constrain them. Rather than accept the world as it is, they become agents for social action and change in order to improve their situation (Giroux 1983; McLaren 1994; Freire, 1974; Ellsworth, 1988).

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the major theoretical approaches in the sociology of education and to explore how sociologists with their differing theoretical perspectives explain school success. This study explores the high school dropout phenomenon and school success through the perspective of students who are at risk of leaving school prematurely and it is grounded within an eclectic model of theories in the sociology of education. Several different and competing theories exist within the discipline of sociology of education, but while sociologists share interest in the same general phenomena, they use different theoretical lenses to interpret these phenomena. Similarly, the students in this study share an interest in the phenomenon of their experience in school failure and their apparent lack of

opportunity to succeed in school. A combination of sociological theories of education also shapes the framework for an analysis of listening to students' voices because they overlap and borrow heavily from each other. Hence, the distinction between them is somewhat blurred and conflicting at times. So too, are the students' narratives, for their stories may appear conflicting and confusing at times, but those who listen to them will understand the importance and urgency of their "messages."

4.2 SOCIAL TRANSMISSION THEORIES

4.2.1 Functionalist Approach

The functionalist approach has its beginning in the work of Emile Durkheim (Pomfret, 1990; Knutilla, 1994; Carlton, Colley & MacKinnon, 1977), a late nineteenth and early twentieth century French sociologists who investigated how the "orientations of individuals might be created and controlled by social forces" (Carlton, Colley & macKinnon, 1977: 9). From such investigations, a paradigm of "social realism" was formulated which basically stated that individuals are products of their society. That is, the beliefs, emotional attachments, values and habits that are acquired have been imposed on individuals by their socio-cultural environment Durkheim (1956) labeled this process as "socialization." Inherent in this approach, is the notion that there are certain structures in society such as, economic, education, and occupation to which individuals must adhere. As such, there appears to be no choice in the matter (Murphy, 1979).

Proponents of functionalist theory use a biological analogy, as they compare the society to a living organism (Murphy, 1979). The functionalist model suggests that each part of an organism plays an important function for its survival. Similarly, members of a society must be able to carry out vital functions, such as cultural transmission, reproduction of goods and services, and allocations and control of power in order to survive” (Bennett and LeCompte, 1990:5). Within this analogy, Murphy (1979) points to the following four basic themes, which he claims, are prominent in the functionalist theory:

- Relating the social systems to biological systems (Brookover and Erickson, 1969; Cremin, 1964; Hunt, 1972; Jenson, 1969).
- The role of institutions as transmitters of culture (Talcott Parsons, 1951).
- The dysfunction of the formal education system for many groups in the perpetuation of some form of inequality (Merton, 1968).
- Hierarchical values of society (Murphy, 1979).

First, there exists “the relative functional autonomy of the parts of the social system” (Murphy, 1979:13). Human beings are living organisms, and as such they rely on the proper interdependent working of each organ. The coordinated work of each organ is vital for individuals to lead a healthy life. “Like living organisms, all societies possess basic functions which they must carry out to survive” (Bennett and LeCompte, 1990:5). Similarly, in society there are “institutionalized systems” which must work in concert for its general good (Durkheim, 1956; Parsons, 1959; Merton, 1967; Turner, 1978). This is necessary for keeping the equilibrium and stability of the society (Mifflin and Mifflin, 1982).

Second, functionalists view the role of “institutionalized systems” as transmitters of the society’s culture. Teevan (1991) suggests that families, polity, churches (religious organizations) and schools are the major institutions that serve as transmitters of culture. From this perspective, formal education is viewed as the means through which society evolves from particularism to universalism and from ascription to achievement; and the role of the public school system is to sort and select the more capable candidates for specific adult roles (Talcott Parsons, 1951).

The biological or bio-psychological influence as opposed to the social or environmental impact on the formulation of IQ has been fiercely debated both inside and outside the academia (Persell, 1977). Consequently, some researchers (Persell, 1977; McLaren, 1994, Spring, 1975) suggest that there are teachers in schools who focus exclusively on deficiencies within the child and family and adhere to what is termed, “cultural deprivation theory”. Opponents of “cultural deprivation theory” argue that to focus exclusively on deficiencies in students’ allows for the nature-nurture debate, and serves to divert attention from questions and research about children’s cognitive abilities and how they learn (Persell, 1977; Eysenck, 1971; Herrnstein, 1973)).

The adherents of the “cultural deprivation”, “difference” as well as the “genetic deficit” models, posit a certain view of knowledge that blames students for their academic inability, hence their failure in school (Persell, 1977; McLaren, 1994). This view suggests that students with an IQ deficit and genetic deficiencies (Jensen, 1979) or lower class students (Eysenck, 1971; Herrnstein, 1973) do poorly in school and in life than those with high IQ and from affluent homes.

This environmental controversy speaks to the issues of ascription and achievement, which have major impact on school success and life outcome (Brookover and Erickson, 1969; Cremin, 1964; Hunt, 1972; Jenson, 1969). The issue of ascribed adult roles in this society was discussed in Chapter two of the literature review of this dissertation. In that chapter, Ogbu (1986) and Berreman (1972) express the notion that racial minorities and economically disadvantaged students are ascribed their positions in life. They both describe ascription as a “caste-like” position. Caste refers to a social group whose membership is fixed by hereditary rules and defined by occupational status. In societies where castes exist they are the primary means by which society is stratified (Bennett and LeCompte, 1995). This suggests that the adult societal roles of racial minorities and economically disadvantaged students are predetermined from birth. The notion of determinism is inherent in this approach, for it espouses that success in school is dependent on wealth and power. Simply put, students from wealthy homes are guaranteed school success, while students from working class families are denied opportunities for success (Althusser, 1972). For this reason, Persell (1977), and Althusser (1972) argue that schools serve to produce unusable skills in order to fill the economic needs of the dominant class in society. Hence, the students from poor and working class families do not benefit in their adult lives from the rewards of high achievement in school (McLaren, 1994). Berreman (1972) argues that imposed positions on individuals in a society results in unequal social distribution of power, livelihood, security, privilege, esteem, freedom and all of one’s life chances (p. 410). Bowles and Gintis (1976) are also disenchanted with the

functionalists' perspective with regards to the socialization process used in the public educational system. They argue that social and economic inequalities in capitalist societies are legitimated, and perpetuated through the socialization process that takes place in schools. Through the socialization process children in public schools are taught discipline and structure, which accurately reproduce those in factories and other economic institutions.

Third, the dysfunction of the formal education for many groups in the perpetuation of some form of inequality (Merton, 1967) is another basic tenet of structural functionalism. This view rests on the conviction that the natural, healthy state of a social system, like that of the body, is to be in equilibrium (Sadovnick et al., 1994). When conflict, like illness occurs, the system works to resolve it as soon as possible. Consequently, conflict will cause change, but in a healthy system change takes place only gradually (Merton, 1967). So in the functionalists' view, inequality is necessary in order to motivate people. Hence, inequality is a good thing. Entwistle (1981) argues that "equality of opportunity implies comparison ...equality of opportunity tends to be applicable only in the context of competition where a number of people are competing for the same goal in accordance with rules that can be addressed as being equal or unequal" (1981:9). Therefore, the dysfunction of the formal education system for many groups in the perpetuation of some form of inequality (Merton, 1967) is a good and desired factor in society. To achieve the desired results from the public school system, functionalists place the full responsibility for success or failure in school outcomes squarely on the

shoulders of each student in claiming that individual effort and ability will lead to achievement.

Entwistle (1981) views life and schooling as a race in which there are winners and losers, and suggests that a fair system must be devised in order to eradicate the malaise of seeming injustices which exist around the uneven distribution of wealth. Central to Entwistle's argument is the notion that everyone in society cannot have the same results and life outcomes. If that were to happen, then society would become dysfunctional. As far as Entwistle is concerned, equality may do justice to individuals, but in order to keep the social equilibrium on a continuum, emphasis must be placed on individual differences, achievement and role performance. This in turn requires differential rewards or prizes for effort and ability (1981:10).

But, sociologists in education (for example: Ogbu, 1986; Castle, 1993; Rist, 1970; Berreman, 1972; Blau and Duncan, 1967 and Oakes, 1985 among others) have argued that for the most part inequality of educational outcome does not rest solely on inequality of abilities. The above thinkers suggest that the problem of inequality of school outcomes rests with the distribution of rewards which are not based on achievement through merit as the functionalists claim. The rewards are distributed in accordance with the students' social class or "ascribed" to those in the lowest social and economic stratum in society.

Bowles and Gintis (1976) in agreeing with the notion of unequal opportunities for some students, describe the process of selection and reward through meritocracy operating in schools as "the legitimization of inequality." The

authors argue that students' expectation of success in life, and their cognitive attitude towards institutions, are configured through differential treatment by authorities and use of the curriculum. Consequently, students on the lowest rungs of the socio-economic ladder become accustomed to a limited role in society, while those students at the top become equally accustomed to positions of privilege and domination (Sheth and Dei 1995). The issue of school success through meritocracy will be discussed further in this section of the dissertation.

Fourth, Mifflen and Mifflen (1982) suggest that the proponents of the functionalist approach view the values in society as being hierarchical. That is, some positions in society are more important than others, or require more skill, or longer periods of training, or have more people depending on them. As a result, higher rewards are given to people who hold important positions in society than those whose positions are less valued. Through transmission people in privileged positions in society have the advantage of passing on the "accepted culture" from one generation to the next. "This in turn, allows the succeeding generation to take up positions in society which will also be rewarded in a privileged way for the same reason" (Mifflen and Mifflen, 1982: 44). Such a situation sets up the social phenomenon of stratification (McLaren 1994; Persell 1977; Bennett and LeCompte 1990). Mifflen and Mifflen (1982) define stratification as, "the hierarchical ordering of groups who pass on their privileges intergenerationally" (p. 44).

As mentioned above, Bennett and LeCompte (1990) claim that adherents of the functionalist theory view the social process of differential evaluation and reward, including intergenerational transmission, as a necessary feature in society.

As such, it ensures that the more important, more difficult, and more demanding roles are always filled which leads to the division of labour or bureaucracy. Durkheim (1961) in his conviction of the necessity of bureaucracy in society, suggests that, in virtually all but the simplest structures, division of labour gives rise to difference in the ranking and evaluation of the individual tasks and those who perform them. Durkheim (1961) views stratification as a function for all.

Grabb (cited in Teevan 1991) suggests that social stratification is the process by which individuals, or categories of individuals, are ranked on the basis of socially differentiated characteristics. "More simply put, social stratification refers to relatively enduring structures of inequality among individuals and groups" (p. 195). Social stratification has great implications for the school life of students, for it involves the transmission of information or knowledge that is prescribed in the curriculum. Underlying the stratification of curriculum, is the notion that some types of knowledge and some types of instructional practices are considered superior to others (Henchey, 2000). Similarly, some curricular programs are more valued than others. For example, university preparation programs are considered to be superior to vocational programs in high school. The reason for this, rests with the belief that university preparation programs lead to more desirable occupations and the children assigned to those programs tend to be more valued and have more social power in school (Bennett and LeCompte, 1995). The importance of the development of suitable curriculum for students such as those in social affairs schools is discussed in Chapter nine of this thesis. The implementation of the curriculum is another factor that is addressed in the analysis of that chapter.

Bowles and Gintis (1976, 2002) dispute the notion of structural boundaries both in schools and in society as it allows for social stratification which hinders school success for the majority of students. In their correspondence theory, they argue that subject specialization in schools corresponds to the hierarchical division of labour in the work place. In this sense, the school curriculum alienates some children and cements more firmly class distinctions – in the same way it's done with workers. Similarly, the function of marks, grades and diplomas is used to correspond with that of wages for workers. The knowledge or learning which students “produce” in pursuit of “rewards” of grades and diplomas is as much a commodity as the product of work from any factory. Added to the discourse then, is the matter of how students receive merit for their work in school.

4.2.2 Meritocracy

Persell (1977) suggests that as our society changed and the reasons for schooling changed there was a shift in the way students work was graded. She points out that as schools shifted their focus from religious and moral instructions to preparing students for work they responded to the demands of the business sector of the society. Consequently, schools responded by placing increasing emphasis on the instrumental and especially, the cognitive aspects of education to provide entry into selected occupations and assure subsequent success (Persell, 1977: 158). In the functionalist approach, Parsons (1959) argues that the major basis for advancing to more highly evaluated roles in this society, is achievement. The more highly valued roles in society are achieved through a system of merit. Parsons

(1951) espouses the notion that the functionalist approach assumes equality of opportunity in society through meritocracy (Parsons, 1959). As such, meritocracy was (and still is today) used to measure students ability and effort in public schools, thus providing the basis for individual rewards.

The ideology of meritocracy as a reward system for students' work, suggests that all students who have the ability and work hard in school would benefit from equal opportunities in society through education as its vehicle (Young, 1971). Weber (1947) expressed the notion that societies based upon meritocracy could allow for upward mobility for individuals with the appropriate abilities, to positions of wealth and power irrespective of their initial social standing. In his view, when achieved merit was the basis for rewards, then the possibilities exist where schools could be used to facilitate economic and social mobility. But, as favourable as the meritocratic ideology appears to be, proponents of conflict and critical models of education have argued that such a notion is a mythical one (Althusser, 1972; Clarke, 1997; Persell, 1977; Dei et al., 1997; Deyhle and Swisher, 1997; McLaren, 1994). As McLaren puts it:

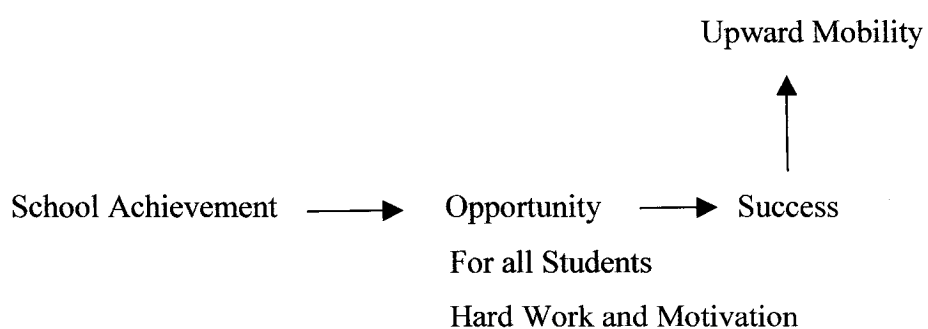
Believers in this myth suggests that inequality results from our established form of "meritocracy," which provides students who are more capable – who try harder and have more innate intelligence – with their rightful rewards and excludes those who are less capable. (1994: 220)

The proponents of the conflict theory suggest that the public school systems that were founded in the nineteenth century by the middle class (i.e., the capitalist class) for the children of workers, were not to educate them per se, but to produce industrious, compliant, docile subservient, conforming and uncomplaining workers. All this is done ostensibly through the meritocratic system connected to the

functionalists' claims (Althusser, 1972; Bowles and Gintis, 1976). The proponents of conflict theory claim that the educational system fosters and reinforces the belief that economic success depends essentially on possessing technical and cognitive skills, and the schools are organized in such a way that they provide these skills efficiently, and equitably in an unbiased fashion through meritocracy. Bowles and Gintis (1976) suggest that meritocracy, as a means of upward social mobility has not been successful because there has been no evidence of change in the economic equality over a century and a half of industrialism. The conflict approach will be discussed in the ensuing section.

FIGURE 1

FUNCTIONALIST PERSPECTIVE OF SCHOOL SUCCESS



4.3 Conflict Approach

The basic tenet of conflict theory was developed by Marxists and Neo-Marxists ideologies. Sociologists in education who favour the conflict approach, claim that in capitalist societies, economics is an important factor in determining the organization of those societies (Blau and Duncan 1967). In particular, great importance is placed on the patterns of ownership of property and its close relationship to one's place in such societies (Marx, 1971). These theorists (Persell, 1977; Althusser, 1971; Gramsci, 1971) also argue that inequality of property and the uneven distribution of resource, are the major sources of conflict in capitalist societies. Conflict theorists such as Coser (1956), Simmel (1968), and Dahrendorf (1956) express dissatisfaction with some views that are held by structural functionalist. They argue that the emphasis placed on social equilibrium for the maintenance of existing patterns is inadequate to explain the dynamism of social systems. In their argument against structural functionalism, proponents of conflict theory suggest that certain important social issues are not addressed in the theory. Issues such as: the sources of consequences of conflict in the social systems (Coser, 1956); how conflicting groups organize and mobilize themselves (Gramsci, 1971; Giroux 1983, Dei et al 1997); the sources of inequality in society (Persell 1977; Dei et al. 1997; Bowles and Gintis, 1976); and how societies change and transform themselves (Giroux 1983a; McLaren 1994) are not addressed in the functionalist theory. As was discussed above, such beliefs have led to fierce opposition of the meritocratic system used in public schools.

The opponents of meritocracy (Althusser, 1972; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Persell, 1977) argue that equality of opportunity does not exist in the public school system. Public schools thwart the process of equal opportunity with the use of entry/qualifying requirements, and diverse “standardized” measurements of social and intellectual achievement. Such a process contributes to the schools’ pretense of impartiality and autonomy (Althusser, 1972; Deyhle and Swisher, 1997; Dei et al. 1997; Clarke, 1997; Persell, 1977). This practice permits public schools to continue in their relatively independent positions within society’s dominant power structures (Spring, 1975).

Sociologists of education who are oriented towards the conflict model view school success from the perspective of history, economics and politics (McLaren, 1994; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Althusser, 1972). So as to ensure school success for all students, Bowles and Gintis (1976) suggest a socialist pedagogy where the curriculum would be student-initiated, and also student-centered. They suggest that this pedagogy would have some similarities to that of Dewey’s democratic pedagogy (1956), but argue that a democratic pedagogy of this type would only be appropriate in a capitalist system. The freedom, autonomy, and democratic social relationship that are implicit in progressive educational theory could not be expected in the real world.

If more students are to succeed in school, proponents of conflict theory encourage a rethinking of the relationship between schools, social class structure, and patterns of economic opportunity (Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Persell, 1977 among others). I will now move the discussion to reproduction theories.

4.4 SOCIAL REPRODUCTION THEORIES

Persell (1977) suggests that the following six themes are included in the reproduction theory:

- ❖ The notion of economic and social inequalities that exist in industrialized capitalist societies;
- ❖ The maintenance and perpetuation of inequalities in favour of the dominant society through the educational system (learned through the hidden curriculum);
- ❖ Reproduction of culture;
- ❖ The ineffectiveness of meritocracy as a vehicle for upward social and economic mobility;
- ❖ The utilization of the dominant ideologies and stratification in the school system to cement and further the practice of uneven distribution in wealth;
- ❖ The use of grades in school to differentiate students for their positions in life.

Contrary to functionalist views on the purpose of schooling, proponents of reproduction theory question the belief that schooling in Western societies promotes democracy, social mobility and equality (Erickson 1993). Rather, public schools are viewed as institutions that reproduce both the values and ideologies of the dominant social groups, and stratification through the process of socialization. According to reproduction theorists (Carnoy, 1972; Persell, 1977; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Boudon, 1974; Carnoy and Levin, 1985), schools do so in several ways. First, teachers in schools use the formal language, and expectations for behaviour are associated with that of the dominant culture (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). These factors are disadvantageous to students from lower classes, because they cannot speak the formal languages as well as members of the middle and

upper classes do. In addition to that factor, children from lower classes usually behave differently from their upper and middle class counter-parts (Berstein, 1977).

Second, schools tend to magnify class differences by sorting individuals into various occupational categories, not so much by their ability, but according to their social class origins (Spring 1985, Willis 1977, McLaren 1994). Thus, children are thought of as being more able, if they are from upper or middle class families, and as a consequence, they are pushed towards professional or more desirable careers. Conversely, lower class or minority children are viewed as less able, and are placed in vocational curricula with lower job expectations (Oakes 1985, Keddie 1971, LeCompte 1985; Kincheloe, 1995). Children are also encouraged towards fulfillment of traditional gender roles (Bennett and LeCompte 1990).

In their study, Blau and Duncan (1967) noticed that the educational and socioeconomic status of fathers tended to be the same as that of their sons. They concluded that status in society is inherited, rather than transcended. Thus, this accounts for the inflexible nature of the whole system of class status in capitalist countries. Blau and Duncan (1967) also suggest that, irrespective of the interpretations placed on how individuals life chances are determined, there can be no denying that the process of schooling is linked as closely to the structure of inequality as it is to having opportunities. From an economic perspective, some researchers posit the notion that the public school system is closely tied to placement in the labour market (see Bowles and Gintis 1976, Persell 1977; Kantor and Lowe, 1995; Castle, 1993; Howe, 1994; Kincheloe, 1995).

Third, the status quo is reinforced by the fact that the dominant groups control the major social and political institutions in society and ensure that competition for control never threatens their power (Persell 1977, Bowles and Gintis). Giroux (1983a) summarizes the process of reproduction in schools like this:

First, schools provided different classes and social groups with the knowledge and skills they needed to occupy their respective places in a labor force stratified by class, race, and gender. Second, schools were seen as reproductive in the cultural sense, functioning in part to distribute and legitimate forms of knowledge, values, language and modes of style that constitute the dominant culture and its interests. Third, schools were viewed as part of an apparatus that produced and legitimated the economic and ideological imperatives that underlie the state's political power. (p. 258)

The three models of reproduction theory are as follows: economic reproduction, cultural reproduction, and hegemonic reproduction. Researchers use these different perspectives to explain how schools promote inequality of education access and perpetuate social class distinctions. Each of these models can be used both at what is referred to as the macro level, or schooling in the larger societal context, and at the micro level, or the smaller, more individual level of classroom and school practice (Woods 1983). These methods are similar to the functionalist model, but their interpretations differ because they employ different theoretical frames to explain their result (Bennett and LeCompte, 1990).

4.4.1 Economic reproduction and the correspondence theory

The economic reproductive model evolved from the work of Bowles and Gintis (1976) in their articulation of the correspondence theory. This view states that power is in the hands of the dominant classes or groups who control all wealth

and capital, and who maintain and reinforce traditional class, ethnic and gender inequalities. Work rules are stratified by race, class and gender and systematically leave certain groups like women, Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans and other minority groups, at a disadvantage. The schools facilitate this through the sorting and selecting process of testing. This process creates a stratified student body by training and ability. In turn, this prepares students with skills, values and attitudes considered “appropriate” for their later roles in the hierarchically stratified occupational structure. Schools therefore, mirror society or correspond to the structure of society at large, is the essence of the correspondence theory (Jackson, 1968; LeCompte, 1978b; Metz, 1978; Borman, 1987). Bowles and Gintis (1976) summarize their correspondence principle thus:

The educational system helps integrate youth into the economic system, we believe, through a structural correspondence between its social relations and those of production. The structure of social relations in education not only inures the student to the discipline of the work place, but develops the kind of personal demeanor, modes of self-presentation, self-image, and social class identification which are the crucial ingredients of job adequacy. (p. 131)

In this sense, schools also mirror the inequalities of society at large so that children learn through both a hidden curriculum and an explicit curriculum the skills and attitudes which will correspond to their later work roles. Jackson (1968) used the term “hidden curriculum” to describe those implicit messages about “appropriate” values, beliefs and behaviours conveyed to children. What the hidden curriculum conveys differs according to the social class, ethnicity, gender, and background of children. The structure of schooling socializes lower and working class children to accept authority, to be punctual, to wait, and to be compliant, while middle class children learn to assume roles of responsibility,

authoritative modes of self-presentation, and independent work habits (Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Persell, 1977; McLaren, 1994). Teachers anticipate that middle class children will need highly developed skills in verbal communication for later work roles, but lower class children will not. Research in primary classroom has confirmed that middle class children are treated very differently from lower class children in this respect (Berstein, 1970; Rist 1970; Labov, 1972; Keddie, 1971).

Proponents of reproduction theory link the failure of schools to reduce poverty and disadvantage, to the inequities of the economic structure in capitalist societies (Carnoy, 1972; Kincheloe, 1975), but the model has been criticized for its one-sided assumption. The criticism lies in the view that structure alone determines outcomes for human beings and in this sense – the students' failure in school (McLaren, 1994). Opponents of reproduction economic theory (Giroux, 1983a; McLaren, 1994) argue that this model does not allow room for individuals to act on behalf of their own destinies. It fails to explain resistance or the conflict and dynamic within the relationships among students, teachers and staff within school settings. This theory has also been criticized for omitting forms of domination based on race, ethnicity, or gender. It is viewed as being radically pessimistic in that it offers little hope for social change or alternative educational practices (Giroux, 1983a; Spring, 1975; Dei et al., 1997).

However, Bowles and Gintis revisited this topic of controversy in 2001 and suggested that additional research has vindicated their views on the correspondence theory that was published in 1976. The authors suggested that in *Schooling in Capitalist America*, the individual-level learning process that accounts for the

effectiveness of the correspondence principle was not explored. But, they argued that some contributions to the study of cultural evolution (Bowles and Gintis, 1986; Boyd and Richerson, 1985; Cavilli-Storza and Feldman, 1981) have allowed them to be considerably more specific about how behaviours are learned in school.

Consequently, they have reaffirmed their original stance on the correspondence principle by stating, “The main scientific findings in *Schooling in Capitalist America* have remained plausible, and their validity has been strengthened over the past quarter century. We believe that the correspondence principle is also, by and large correct” (2002: 14). The authors of the correspondence model (Bowles and Gintis, 1976, 2002) view school success a factor that is intricately linked to students’ social and economical status in society.

4.4.2 Cultural reproduction

Another group of sociologists identifies “cultural reproduction” as the link between schools and the class structure (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bernstein, 1977). Cultural reproduction goes beyond transmission of the class structure; it examines how class-based differences are expressed in the political nature of school knowledge, as well as cultural and linguistic practices embedded in the formal school curriculum (Bernstein, 1977). Bernstein’s (1977) studies of differences in social class and linguistic codes suggest that inequalities of social class begin with class-based differences in the linguistic codes of the family. These are in turn, reinforced by the schools, thereby contributing to students’ success or

failure. The issue of culture and its influence on education was previously discussed in Chapter two of this thesis.

The discussion in Chapter two highlights the notion that high cultural capital forms the basis on which schools are built (Bennett and LeCompte, 1990; Sadovnick et al. 1994). Therefore, school success within this concept is highly dependent on the cultural capital that students take to school (McLaren, 1994). Consequently, it is more difficult for poor children to be successful in school (Oakes, 1985; McLaren, 1994; Rist, 1970; Kincheloe, 1995). Students who are at risk of dropping out may get discouraged when the school refuses to recognize that the difficulties they face are the direct result of lacking the cultural capital and social knowledge valued by schools. Purposefully ignoring students' lack of cultural capital could help to hasten their departure from school prematurely (Sheth and Dei 1995; Persell, 1977) instead of contributing to their success. Dei et al. (1997) suggest that when students are treated in a way that does not take into account the "intersection of diverse social locations," the school abrogates its duty of encouraging all students to succeed (p. 10).

4.4.3 Hegemonic reproduction

The central concern of this model is the complex role of government intervention in the educational system (Althusser, 1972; Gramsci, 1971). The term hegemony refers to the societal consensus or "organizing principle, or world view that is diffused by agencies of ideological control and socialization in every area of daily life" (Boggs, 1976:39). In other words, the government and its agencies play key roles in the production and dissemination of knowledge by determining the

curriculum, as well as determining how the curriculum is presented in schools (Persell, 1977). Therefore, the knowledge that is disseminated in schools is not neutral or bias free (Ghosh, 1996). Giroux (1983b) explains that hegemony is reflected in schools not only in the formal curriculum, but also in routines and social relationships, and in the way knowledge is structured.

Sociologists in education who hold the hegemonic paradigm (Althusser, 1972; Gramsci, 1971; Persell, 1977; Spring, 1988a), criticize the economic and cultural models of reproduction for failing to consider how powerful the political intervention of the state is, in enforcing policies which are directly related to the reproductive function of education. The hegemonic model by contrast, is convinced that the government and its agencies are directly involved in the actual production of knowledge taught in schools, and that they exercise control over schools through regulation of certification requirements, length of compulsory schooling, and guidelines for mandatory curriculum requirements (Persell, 1977).

In this society, the ideologies of the dominant group are used to legitimate the rules and regulations that are used to form modes and concepts of all state apparatuses (Persell, 1977). The education system, being one of the state apparatuses, formulates its rules and concepts from those legitimated ideologies (Althusser, 1972). McLaren (1994) suggests that the hegemonic hold on the social system as a whole is so great, that it is able to withstand and neutralize various forms of dissension by permitting token opposition (p. 187). Carnoy (1972) agrees with Persell (1972) that schools are used to legitimate and perpetuate the ideologies of the dominant class and thereby maintain inequalities in society. The ideological

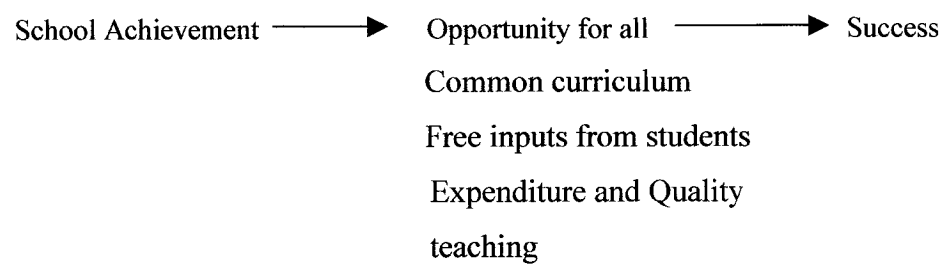
conditioning that takes place in society and schools allows them to claim some air of “objectivity” and “equity.” (Dei et al., 1997). Nevertheless, behind the façade of those practices, schools are achieving the diametrically opposite goals of partiality and equality (McLaren, 1994; Wilson, 1991). On this view, Mifflin and Mifflin (1982) suggest that, “inequality exists for arbitrary reasons and is the result of power alone” (p. 7-8).

So far in the discussion of cultural transmission theories, several themes have emerged. Functionalism and theories of reproduction all address the macro, or structural aspects of schooling and its role in cultural transmission. The major differences between functionalism and reproductive theories lie in their interpretation of cultural transmission. Functionalists believe in the existence of an underlying consensus regarding social beliefs and values (Durkheim, 1961; Parson, 1959; Merton, 1967). This assumption is taken for granted hence, it is expected to remain unquestioned and unchallenged. Reproduction theorists are critical of this assumption, arguing that, social attitudes and values reflect stratification in the society as a whole (Coser, 1956; Simmel, 1968; Darendorf, 1956). They are primarily concerned with how schools act to serve the interest of the dominant groups in society by replicating the existing social class structure and maintaining the division of labour necessary for a society stratified by class, ethnicity and gender (Persell, 1977). These theories differ on how school success is attained and ultimately the chances one has in life for upward mobility. These conflicting views are reflected in some of the students’ stories in this study. For in analyzing their narratives it appears that the students have “internalized” parts of the functionalist

model, yet they question the contradiction between their school experiences and what the approach advocates for the achievement of success.

FIGURE 2

CONFLICT MODEL APPROACH TO SCHOOL SUCCESS



4.5 SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION THEORIES

In this section, I will discuss sociological theories whose central tenets are those of transformation, rather than transmission of culture. Interpretive and critical theories of education draw upon theories of reproduction. Their commonality with each other and their difference with transmission theories, is that they view people within school settings as active rather than passive participants in the social construction of their own reality (Woods, 1983).

4.5.1 Interpretive theory

One of the major tenets of symbolic interaction is understanding societal structures and processes by making investigations at the micro level (Weber, 1946; Woods, 1983; Mead, 1934; Porter, 1965). Interpretations are made by individuals according to the situation in which they find themselves (Woods, 1983). Therefore, meanings that are applied to objects and people's relationship will constantly change according to the situation in which they are acted. The realities of individuals are not fixed and unchangeable (Dewey, 1929; Popper, 1968; Phillips, 1987; Woods, 1983), they are in a constant flux.

Researchers within the interpretive approach, view schools as places where meaning is constructed through the social interaction of people within the setting (Woods, 1983; Willis, 1977; Keddie, 1971; Hargreaves, 1979). Sociologists within this paradigm believe that the best way to understand the process of schooling is to analyze what goes on in schools, communities and classrooms through an interpretive approach. This means studying the real world situations using qualitative or descriptive rather than experimental methods of inquiry (Wilson,

1991; Deyhle, 1997; Dei et al., 1997). So, the interpretive model adopts for its methodology, an approach that uses qualitative, descriptive method designs for research investigations (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Patton, 1990).

Sociologists working within this paradigm are referred to as 1) phenomenologists, 2) ethnomethodologists (Cicourel, 1964; Garfinkel, 1967), or 3) symbolic interactionists (Blumer, 1969). The interactionist approach is derived from Mead (1934) and focuses on what Blumer (1969) terms, the “situated action”. Symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969) is the study of the meanings people construct in their interactions with one another over time.

The commonality that exists between the three branches of this approach is “the social construction of meaning in social interaction” (Bennett & LeCompte, 1995: 19). This view suggests that, “human beings act towards things on the basis of the meaning that things have for them” (Blumer, 1969:2). It suggests then, that the way teachers and other school personnel behave towards children with different social attributes will depend upon the meanings those attributes have for teachers (Rist, 1970; Oakes, 1985). “Thus class or race might indicate low learning ability to some teachers” (Persell, 1977: 14). This orientation then, shifts the focus of the defined attributes of the students to the meanings imputed to a particular characteristic by teachers and others in important positions, and the consequences of the behaviours of those personnel.

The meaning of social interactions are elicited through descriptive methods heavily dependent upon direct observation and often participant observation in school settings (Bennett and LeCompte 1990: 22). For example,

Keddie (1971) examined the organization of the curriculum, teacher-student interactions, and the terminology, or categories into which educators divided their students. Using the interpretive method, Keddie's (1971) study illustrated how the use of differentiated curriculum impedes the academic achievement of lower class students.

Furthermore, this view suggests that participants modify their own behaviour based on their interpretations of others' actions. Persell (1977) agrees with this position, but cautions that one should not concentrate exclusively upon learning what definitions of the situation teachers or pupils hold, because the question of why certain definitions are more relevant for teachers or pupils than others may be overlooked. Here she states, "a single minded concern with participants, definitions of situations excludes the possibility that parameters are set upon social interaction and definitions by the economic and social contexts in which they occur" (Persell, 1977:15).

As suggested by Persell, this view raises questions about the processes of interaction in a given situation and about the situational significant beliefs and values. Consequently, interpretive theorists have had their share of criticism. Their critics (McLaren 1994, Giroux, 1983) are disenchanted with their single-minded focus on micro-level analyses to the exclusion of macro-level concerns. Proponents of the interpretive approach are criticized for ignoring the link between social, political, and economic constraints and other such problems as discrimination by class, ethnicity and gender. Although these researchers may hold

perspectives similar either to functionalism or reproduction theory, they do not explicitly address political issues. Apple (1982) describes his stance as follows:

In the United States, England and France, it was argued that the question that most sociologists of education and curriculum asked concealed the fact that assumptions about real relations of power were already embedded in their research models and the approaches from which they drew. As Young put it, sociologists were apt to 'take' as their research problems those questions that were generated out of the existing administrative apparatus, rather than 'make' them themselves. In curriculum studies, it was claimed that issues of efficiency and increasing meritocratic achievement had almost totally depoliticized the field. Questions of 'technique' had replaced essential political and ethical issues of what we should teach and why. (1982: 16)

Despite the criticisms levied at the interpretive theorists, it is my view that the interpretive model of school success is a progressive one. Sociologists within this approach perceive school success as students having the opportunity to experience learning as a growth process, and to participate in the construction of knowledge (Woods, 1983). School success also means the development of each student to his/her fullest potential (Dewey, 1956; Ghosh, 1996). The teaching task therefore, is to discover children's frameworks, and how they interpret and learn, and to foster their development. According to Woods (1983), "the child is a candle to be lit, rather than a vessel to be filled" (p. 43).

4.6 CRITICAL THEORY

4.6.1 The Frankfurt School

Critical theory has its origin in the Frankfurt School (Bronner and Kellner, 1989). The Frankfurt School is a school of thought that is associated with works from members of the Institut für Sozialforschung or Institute for Social Research (Horkheimer, 1932). The institute was the first Marxist-oriented research center

affiliated with a major German university (Held, 1980). The Institute was established in Frankfurt, Germany during 1923 with Carl Grunberg as its director (Kellner, 1989). Among the best known theorists of the Frankfurt School were Max Horkheimer, Theodore Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm, Friedrich Pollock, Leo Lowenthal, and Walter Benjamin. Later, Jurgen Hebermas joined the group (Jay 1973, Hughes 1975, Kellner 1989b). These social science theorists were influenced by the political occurrences of the day. Each of these thinkers had observed the beginning of communism in Russia and the resulted rise of fascism in Italy. They had live through World War 1 witnessing the rise of Hitler (Held, 1980). They entered that war with a view that the conflict (although it was terrible) was necessary to eliminate the social, political and economic evil that existed then (Kellner, 1989a). The philosophers believed and shared Marx's theory of historical materialism. As such, they formed reactions that were attempts to reconcile Marxist theory with the reality of what people and governments of the world were going through (Lowenthal, 1980).

The intent of the institute was to be empirical, historical, and oriented toward solving the problems of the European working class (Kellner, 1984). Horkheimer described the goal of their work as developing a "theory of contemporary society as a whole," aiming at "the entirety of the social process. It presupposes that beneath the chaotic surface of events one can grasp and conceptualize a structure of the effective powers" (1972: 1). This theory would be based on the results of historical studies and the individual sciences and would therefore strive for the status of "science" (1972:1 and 4). Yet these investigations would not exclude philosophy,

"for it is not affiliation to a specific discipline, but its importance for the theory of society which determines the choice of material" (1972:1). As such, traditional theory uncritically reproduces the existing society, while critical theory articulates activity striving to transform society. As Horkheimer puts it:

Critical theory is thus rooted in "critical activity" which is oppositional and which is involved in a struggle for social change and the unification of theory and practice. "Critique," in this context, therefore involves criticism of oppression and exploitation and the struggle for a better society.

So within the framework of a Hegelian-Marxian paradigm (dialectics, historical materialism, and the Marxian critique of political economy and theory of revolution) the Frankfurt school engaged in frequent methodological and substantive debates with other social theorists (Adorno, et al, 1976). Their most fervent dispute was directed towards the *positivists* in which they criticized the empirical and quantitative approaches to social theory. At the same time they defended their own speculative and critical brand of social theory (Kellner, 1984).

As previously mentioned, Marxism is central to critical theory. However, by the 1930s, the powerful parties and unions of the European working classes were defeated by the forces of fascism, although capitalism underwent one of its most intense crises at that time (Kellner, 1984). With the rise of Nazism, the Great Depression and the demise of the Weimer Republic it became apparent that World War 1 had not set the stage for utopian development (Horkheimer, 1989). Neither war, nor the new natural and social sciences had solved human problems and the world was on the verge of another war (Tar, 1985). Indeed, following that defeat, the prospects for socialist revolution looked ever bleaker to the Institute theorists (Tar, 1985).

The despair over these conditions destroyed a conviction that sciences could solve human problems that existed since eighteenth century Enlightenment (Kellner, 1978). As a consequence, the members of the Frankfurt School increasingly distanced themselves from the traditional Marxist position which claimed that socialist revolution was inevitable and that historical progress would necessarily lead from capitalism to socialism (Buck-Morss, 1977). They were also critical of the economic determination of Marxism because it ignored the influence of culture in the perpetuation of inequality and oppression (Wolin, 1992). So the members of the Frankfurt School developed a theory to explain the reason for the failure of the socialist revolution to accomplish its stated goal in the mid-nineteenth century as Marx had prophesied (Held, 1980). Marcuse, Adorno, and Horkheimer thought that they had to reconstruct the logic and method of Marxism in order to develop a Marxism relevant to emerging twentieth-century capitalism (Marcuse, 1964). They did not believe that they were recanting Marx's basic understanding of capitalism as a self-contradictory social system (Horkheimer, 1972). In particular, the Frankfurt School theorists, following the Hungarian Marxist Georg Lukacs (1971), attempted to link economic with cultural and ideological analysis in explaining why the revolution expected by Marx did not occur. Like Lukacs (who used the term *reification* to refer to deepened alienation in an emerging "late" capitalism), the Frankfurt theorists believed that Marx underestimated the extent to which workers' (and others') false consciousness could be exploited to keep the social and economic system running smoothly (Kellner, 1978). Habermas' views also departed significantly from certain positions of the founders of the Frankfurt

school (Habermas 1970, 1987a). Habermas (1971) rejected Marcuse, Adorno, and Horkheimer's view that change should not be limited to social policy, but should include the whole technological interaction with nature. Habermas (1971:32-33) calls this view "a heritage of mysticism." His resulting critical communication theory is closer to the parliamentary social democracy of Bernstein (1961) and, later, the Scandinavians, than it is to traditional Marxist concepts of class struggle.

Members of the Frankfurt School were disillusioned with the outcome of World War 1 and because of Nazi persecution in the Second World War, they relocated the Institute to Columbia University in New York during the 1930s (Bennett and LeCompte, 1995). Their work produced a proliferation of landmark empirical studies of race and prejudice, which influenced many North American scholars. (For example, Canadians such as Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren, and Americans such as Michael Apple, Maxine Greene and Nel Noddings among others). The critical perspectives of the Frankfurt School are the foundations for critical theorists (Kellner, 1989b).

4.6.2 Critical theory – underlying assumptions

The analysis of the Frankfurt School was a critique of traditional or bourgeois perspectives, which assumes that social phenomena could be understood through scientific methods of description, classification, generalization and quantification (Stockman, 1984). This traditional view is referred to as *positivism*, and is patterned after the method of inquiry that is used in the natural sciences (Phillips, 1987; Popper, 1968). Knowledge gained by this type of research is presented as

objective, value-free and “scientific” (Bennett and LeCompte, 1995). However, Frankfurt School theorists were critical of the positivistic model on the grounds that human phenomena could not be understood in the same way that physical phenomena could (Horkheimer, 1972).

Whereas positivistic research tends to ignore historical antecedents, critical theorists consider historical analysis central to the understanding of social phenomena (Peshkin, 1993). The Frankfurt School members believed that neither social phenomena nor research methods - and even the decision to use specific methods – could be separated from their social and historical context (Tar, 1985). Both were embedded in social values and therefore could not be considered objective but rather were expressive of a particular theoretical or philosophical position. These ideas came to be known as “critical theory” (Horkheimer, 1972). Critical theorists advocate recognition of this subjectivity through a process of self-criticism and self-reflection (Adorno, et al, 1976). Hence, Horkheimer and Adorno, like Marcuse (1964), reject positivism as a worldview of social, economic or political adjustment.

Max Horkheimer coined the term, “critical theory” to contrast with what they were doing with the positivism (Tar, 1985). Each theorist adjusted Marxism to his personal view, and then used that view, as a measure of what modern society needed to achieve (Held, 1980). Thus, the critical theory project initially involved attempts of individuals from various disciplines to work together. Collectively they aimed to develop a historical and systematic theory of contemporary society. This indeed, was in opposition to merely bringing individuals from separate

disciplines together to work as specialists on different topics for research and inquiry (Klein, 1980). As such, critical theory is said to “transgress” boundaries between competing disciplines, and stresses interconnections between philosophy, economics and politics, and culture and society (Giroux, 1992). As Leo Lowenthal (1980) puts it:

The term "interdisciplinary work" simply "means nothing more than to leave the disciplines as they are while developing certain techniques which foster a kind of acquaintance between them without forcing them to give up their self-sufficiency or individual claims." Critical Theory, on the contrary, criticized the validity claims of the separate disciplines and attempted to create a new kind of critical social theory. (p. 109)

Consequently, critical theory explodes the boundaries, which separate our academic disciplines into such things as economics, political science, philosophy, sociology, etc. (Giroux, 1990). It claims that there are epistemological and metaphysical problems with a theory that excludes interconnectedness of phenomena in the world, or from our experience of it (Horkheimer, 1972). It suggests that the accepted view of separating disciplines from its conceptual boundaries, is by nature one-sided, limited, and flawed. As such, critical theory transgresses established disciplinary boundaries and creates new disciplines, theories, and discourses that avoid the deficiencies of the traditional academic division of labor as postulated by Durkheim (Max Horkheimer, 1972; Herbert Marcuse, 1968). Critical Theory is thus, among other things, a critique of the boundaries between disciplines, and a theory of the mediations (or interconnections) which connect and integrate various modes and dimensions of social reality into a social system or "society" (Kellner, 1989a).

The emergence of critical theory resulted in a combination of perspectives with several common elements (Wolin, 1992). For example, it combines both macro and micro analyses of social phenomenon (Bennett and LeCompte, 1995). It uses the analytical basis and many of the concepts of both functionalism and conflict theory (Kellner, 1989a). It shares with conflict theory a concern for the existence of social and economic inequality, and a conviction that inequality is determined by the structure of economic organization, especially the ownership of property (Coleman, 1990). Like conflict theorists, critical theorists (Giroux 1983; Apple, 1986) believe that inherent in social organizations, are contradictions which cause their opposites. For example, for every group of liberated people, there exists an oppressed group. However, contradiction helps to destabilize the society and eventually forces progressive change to take place. Critical theorists also borrow from symbolic interactionism and phenomenology, the belief that social reality is constructed and operated at multiple levels of meanings (Woods, 1983). Knowledge and understanding of meaning also serve as sources of inequality because they are stratified and distributed unequally (Foucault, 1980; Habermas, 1971).

Elements of poststructuralist and postmodernist theories are also common to critical theory. Proponents of both of these theories join critical theorists in rejecting the central tenet of positivism (Stockman, 1984). From a methodological perspective, poststructuralism focuses on the ways in which people write and read text in sociology (Agger, 1992); while postmodernism contribution to sociology chiefly concerns itself with the rejection of a single universal voice in science

(Lyotard, 1984). However, they are both relevant in the various sociological contributions to the study of state, ideology, culture, discourse, social control, and social movements (Agger, 1992). Both poststructuralism and postmodernism reject the notion of a universal social science, arguing instead for a particular mode of knowledge that is defined by the multiplicity of people's subjective positions. In many respects, this is highly reminiscent of social phenomenology and ethnomethodology (e.g., Schutz 1967, O'Neill, 1974), both of which emphasize the importance of experience and reject social-structural analysis. This should not be surprising because postmodernism, phenomenology, and ethnomethodology emerge from some of the same sources, notably the philosophies of Nietzsche and Heidegger, both of whom rejected the Enlightenment's attempt to create a universal knowledge (Diesing 1991).

4.6.3 Poststructuralism: Main ideas

There is substantial overlap between poststructuralism and postmodernism (Best and Kellner 1990). However, in joining forces with the Frankfurt members, poststructuralists add another dimension to the original critique of science, by demonstrating that all sorts of discursive text can be read as rhetoric (Luke, 1991). By so doing, it draws attention to the way in which the subtexts of literary science is presented (e.g., acknowledgments, citations, literature reviews etc.). Poststructuralism reveals how language helps to constitute reality. In this sense, it offers new ways to read and write science (Derrida, 1987). It suggests non-positivistic strategies for social science writers to deconstruct their own and

heighten their reflexivity (Gouldner, 1970; Neal, 1972b). Deconstruction as a methodology of textual reading (Culler, 1982) has offered a serious challenge to traditional literary and cultural criticism that is usually dominated by textual objectivism (Lentricchia, 1980). It argues that scientific literature can be written differently from mainstream formulation (less technically) without sacrificing important technical details (Marcuse and Fischer 1986). In my view, this methodology has enhanced the reading and writing of scientific material by unmasking it and making it more transparent to the lay person.

As Richardson (1990c) postulates, poststructuralism politicizes and democratizes science by opening its text to outsiders, allowing them to engage with science's surface rhetoric more capably as well as to contest science's deep assumptions where necessary. He further argues that when science is written from such a perspective of deconstruction, it avoids over-reliance on technical and figural gestures. But, instead it allows for continuous transparency in its assumptions, thus providing an invitation to readers to join or challenge them.

4.6.4 Postmodernism: Main ideas

A postmodern social theory examines the social world from the multiple perspectives of class, race, gender and other identifying group affiliations (Kellner, 1988). Postmodernism is an explicit rejection of the "totalizing" tendencies as well as political radicalism of Marxism (Lyotard, 1984). Like most postmodernists, Lyotard maintains that one cannot tell large stories about the world but only small stories from the heterogeneous "subject positions" of individuals and

plural social groups. Consequently, postmodernists suggests ways to “detotalize” the multiple voice of science so that it reflects the variety of positions from which ordinary people can speak knowledgeably about the world (Agger, 1992). This has the advantage of challenging singular methodologies – be it of a qualitative or quantitative nature, as well as multiple perspective on class, race and gender (Marcuse and Fischer, 1986). It also empowers a variety of muted voices to enter the discussions on social issues, thus giving legitimacy to their intervention into the scientific field. This intervention of course, lends credence to such a paradigm and elevates it to a position, which was previously privileged mainly by the mainstream positivist position (Foucault, 1980).

But while the original critical theory is under attack by poststructuralists, feminists (Delamont, 1989; Lather, 1986; Ellsworth 1988; Hooks, 1994) and anti-rationalists (Ellsworth 1988) for an approach that is viewed as limiting the “multiple voices” (Geertz, 1973, 1988) of all participants such as women, members of minority groups, and students – in social interaction; Kroker & Cook (1986) dismiss poststructuralism and postmodernism as merely political posturing. They scathingly suggest that postmodernism is simply a cultural movement. Kellner (1989) takes a similar position and argues that critical theory's traditional goal of providing a theory of the present age and radical politics provides superior perspectives to those often found in postmodern and poststructural theories. He suggests that these new critical theories disable both theoretical inquiry and political practice (Kellner 1989b).

Despite the harsh criticisms that are levied at poststructuralists and postmodernists, they are relentless in their accusation of critical theorists for substituting another form of hegemonic domination, for the elitism of traditional capitalist or bureaucrats (Bell Hooks, 1994). Opponents of critical theory (LeCompte and Bennett 1988) also believe that models of resistance to oppression which are appropriate for working and middle class males of European descent may be totally inappropriate for non-European, non-working class and non-male individuals. The emancipation advocated by critical theorists is predicated upon Western European notions of power and group relations. Imposing this view on people who are not part of that tradition is no less authoritarian, say the critics than other kinds of oppression (LeCompte and Bennett 1988; Burtonwood 1986; Ellsworth 1988). However, on both sides of the debate, the agreed position is that both schools provide a powerful challenge to mainstream theory's presuppositions, methodologies, and lack of critical reflexivity (Kellner, 1989b; Agger, 1992; Marcus and Fischer, 1986).

So in relationship to school success, sociologists who are oriented towards a critical theory hold the view that "knowledge is power" (Gramsci, 1971; Freire, 1970). Therefore, school success means that students have gained knowledge to empower themselves, and to give voice to those who are voiceless because of their gender, race and class; and in so doing change the existing social injustices and inequalities (Greene, 1988; Gramsci, 1971: McLaren, 1994).

4.7 TOWARD AN INTEGRATED THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' NARRATIVES

In the previous sections of this chapter, I provided an overview of transmission, reproduction and transformative sociological views as they are reflected in the functionalist, conflict, interpretive, and critical theories. Different meanings of school success were explored within the context of each conceptual framework and the similarities and differences among the theories were compared. This section of the chapter examines the framework of the study. In so doing, it also emphasizes the complexity of the high school dropout phenomenon and points out how the diversity and commonality that exist within the functionalist, conflict, interpretive and critical approaches are helpful with the analysis of this research.

As is evident in Chapter two of this dissertation, researchers in their quest for answers to the high school dropout problem and an increase in school retention, have examined areas of inter-related factors that might have influenced students to leave school before they graduate. Although there are many inter-related factors that engulf students who eventually drop out of school, for the most part sociologists in their research focus on a single factor, and they usually place their study within the framework of one theory (Tanner, 1990; Mickelson and Smith, 2000). For example, Dei and his colleagues in their (1997) research on high school dropouts focused on the issue of race as the primary contributing factor to the problem, while opting to use critical theory in the analysis of their research. Wilson (1991) examined the high school dropout problem through cultural lenses and she also selected to use critical theory as the framework for her study. Dei and

his colleagues (1997) suggest that the high school dropout phenomenon in Canada is generally viewed as a failure. But whose failure it is, depends on what side of the educational fence one sits.

There are numerous inter-related factors that impact on students' decision to drop out of school. These factors are reflected in the results of studies that examined race (Spring, 1989; McLaren, 1994), social class (Ogbu, 1986; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), gender (Willis, 1977; McRobbie, (1978) and culture (Bernstein, 1977, Labov, 1972; Rist, 1973; Katz, 1971) as issues that impact on students school outcome. From such an observation, it is my view that the issue of high school dropout is far too complex to use one theory to analyze this project. Therefore, I am suggesting that no single theory has all the components necessary to satisfy the various factors included in one student's or a group of students' needs to stay in school. So in this research, I have chosen to use a combination of theoretical views that are embodied in the functionalist, conflict, interpretive and critical approaches to analyze the students' narrative.

The selection of an eclectic approach of theories for this analysis is consistent with my choice of a qualitative methodology which includes the use of data from narratives, first person accounts, and life histories (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Patton, 1990). This enables me to be subjective and to gain a holistic view and an in-depth understanding of students who are at risk of dropping out of school.

Anchoring the analysis of this research within a variety of sociological theories of education suggests that there are different groups of students in public

schools, and so there are different perspectives and needs to be met. On this issue, there is a dire need for the voices of students at risk to be heard in public schools as to what their needs are for success. Not only the students' lived experiences are complex, but the stories they tell are also complex and confusing. Consequently, the use of multiple theories is helpful in teasing out the salient "messages" that the students' narrative convey. In so doing, it indicates that this project responds to the need for multiple voices to be heard as advocated by Maxine Greene (1988) and Gloria Ladson-Billing (1994).

For the purpose of this study, I view the positivist approach to research as being inadequate to examine the complex, uncontrollable and multifaceted behaviours that take place in the schools – which are the sites of this project. As such, I have relied on the open-ended interviewing process used in this study as one of the tools with which the participants' stories are analyzed (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). Within the eclectic framework of theories, the interpretive model guides the analysis of the research in sharing the view that who the participants are, what they do, and what they become are all product of their past experiences (Bennett and LeCompte, 1995). The use of such a model calls for attention to be paid to the individual history of the subjects and the stories they tell, as invaluable parts of the analysis. Therefore, interpretive theory is important to this project, because it is the approach I have used in describing as accurately as possible the views of the students in this study.

Although the interpretive model primarily focuses on the micro-level interactions within the schools and the classroom, it does adhere to the view that

schools are places where meaning is constructed through the social interaction of people (Young, 1971; Woods, 1983). Students' perception is central to this study and as such the interpretive framework is important for it emphasizes how students and teachers construct their realities and define their situation (Woods, 1983).

But some critical researchers (Apple, 1995b; Aronowitz and Giroux, 1993) have attacked the interpretive model by arguing that it does not encompass the relationship between schooling and society. In their discourse, they suggest that although interpretive theory aids our understanding of how educators and students interact, it does not ask why these interactions proceeded as they did. However, from my point of view, numerous researchers have previously asked the question as to why students drop out of high school (e.g., in Canada, Dei et al., Lawton, 1992; Statistic Canada, 1991; Tanner, Krahn and Hartnagel, 1995; Cummins 1989b; MacKay & Myles, 1995 among others). The answers to that question have resulted in underscoring the skewed rate of school success between students from socially and economically advantaged homes and students from minority and poor homes (Dei et. al., 1997). The answers have also helped in bringing to the fore the plight of disabled and special needs students in public schools (Committee of Canadian Council for Exceptional Children, 1992; Lusthaus, 1987).

Such answers have confirmed previous findings and have also added to the body of existing knowledge regarding the high school dropout issue. Consequently, many theories abound as to the reasons students drop out of high school (some of which were discussed in the Chapter two). Needless to say, all these findings have immensely contributed to our understanding of why students

drop out of school. Since previous work has informed us about why students drop out of high school, I have built on that body of information. Therefore, my defense in including the interpretive model in this framework rests with the intention of the research – not to find out why, but to hear from the students what their views are about school success and what they perceive their needs are to experience that success.

Despite Apple (1995) and Aronowitz and Giroux (1993) expressed disenchantment with the interpretive model, they have used critical theory to unite the macro and micro levels of analysis “into one lens through which to view and understand the schooling process” (Bennett and LeCompte, 1995). This is helpful for I also favour critical theory. Critical theory assists us in analyzing how schools are used to help dominant groups to maintain their power as well as how subordinate groups resist this power (McLaren, 1994; Ogbu, 1978; Hartnagel and Krahm, 1989). It also aids in the analysis of schools as places where a class-based society is reproduced through the use of economic, cultural and hegemonic capital of the dominant social class (Hoy, and McCarthy, 1994). Social transformation theories as presented in the views of critical theorists are also important to this study. They espouse the notion of “active involvement by participants as human agency and a belief that despite the influence of oppressive reproductive forces, hope for transformation for society is maintained because of the existence of agency” (Bennett and LeCompte, 1995: 25).

Critical theory emphasizes the power of individuals to structure their own destiny (Freire, 1970), so if more students are to achieve school success, each

student must ensure that he/she possesses all the tools necessary for making independent decisions (Gramsci, 1971). Such tools as critical thinking, reflective thinking, creative thinking, and all that are important to become good citizens and make valuable contribution to the society must be developed and encouraged (Ghosh, 1996, Gramsci, 1971, McLaren, 1994 and Greene, 1988). In McLaren's words, "These are students in drastic need of a critical pedagogy, a new way of viewing schooling, that can enable them to analyze their oppression, and to take steps to redress the conditions that perpetuate it" (1994: 14).

Although my theoretical preferences are those of interpretive and critical theories, I repeat here, that I have placed this project within the conceptual framework of a combination of the major theoretical approaches (namely, functionalist, conflict and interpretive theories). I have also used a number of views from sociologists within these approaches in the analysis of this study. The Canadian public school system is greatly influenced by the social transmission theories of functionalism and structural functionalism (Dei et al. 1997). These theories impact greatly on the content and structure in schools. "Functionalists view the public school system as one of the structures which carry out the function of transmission of attitudes, values, skills and norms from one generation to another" (Bennett and LeCompte, 1995: 7). But the system is skewed in favour of one group (Gradwell, 2002), so it results in inequality of educational outcomes. The results of the inequity in educational attainment raise concerns for proponents of conflict theory (Persell, 1977; Bowles and Gintis, 1976). Conflict theory is important in understanding the students' perception of meritocracy and their

individual location in the public school system.

From the discussion in this chapter, it appears that there are many factors in the public school system that need to be addressed if school success is to be increased. However, it is my view that there is merit to the present public school system for it provides the primary process by which our society's ways of life, values, beliefs, norms and standards for appropriate behaviour are passed on from one generation to the next. I will reiterate here, that there is some merit to all educational theories, consequently, I have used an eclectic model of theories in this analysis.

Since this study is based in Quebec, the following chapter examines the child welfare agency in this province. Included in the chapter, is a description of the three social affairs schools that provide educational services for mostly students who are at risk of leaving school prematurely. The physical structures, programs, and the intervention models of each school are also discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

CHILD WELFARE AGENCIES AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS SCHOOLS IN QUEBEC

Child welfare agencies in Quebec offer a range of services consistent with the Youth Protection Act for children and youths two to eighteen years old (Youth Protection Act, 1984). For example, they are concerned with children who may be in danger either because of their behaviour or the behaviour of that of their parents (Batshaw Youth and Family Centres, 1999). The agencies are responsible for attending to child protection reports (signalements) related to physical and sexual abuse of children, neglect, and or parental behaviour that creates a risk for the child (Batshaw social worker, 1999). The child welfare agencies also provide foster care for youngsters who cannot be cared for by their parents (Batshaw Youth and Family Centres, 1997). Sometimes there are problems with the child that the parents are unable to successfully address, so an agency intervenes with a view to diminishing or eliminating the problem (Executive Director of Services, Batshaw Youth and Family Centres 1997).

The agency with which this study is involved is called Batshaw Youth and Family Centres. Its name was taken from Manuel Batshaw who headed the 1976 investigation regarding the state of youths in detentions in Quebec (Batshaw Youth and Family Centres, 1999). Organizationally, Batshaw is an amalgamation of four founding agencies – Youth Horizons, Mount St. Patrick's Youth Centre, Ville Marie Child and Youth protection Centre and Shawbridge Youth Centres. This amalgamation took place in 1996 when the

government directed that child welfare services should be streamlined for cost effectiveness and continuity of services for parents (Dowie, 1993).

Batshaw serves the English speaking community of Quebec. In the period from April 1996 to March 1997, the Agency received 3, 796 reports of children and youths who needed their intervention. Approximately 95 per cent of the admissions to the Agency are either voluntary or court ordered, while five percent of admissions are the result of referrals made through the Young Offenders Act and the Act Respecting Health and Social Services (Batshaw Executive Director of Services, 1997).

When children or youths are admitted by an agency, they are usually taken out of their natural home and placed in “substitute care” in a residential centre (Youth Protection Act, 1984). In residential centres usually the stated purpose for admission to its program is the child’s or youth’s psycho-social problems which manifests themselves in “unacceptable behaviours” (Barwick, 1992). Usually, the “unacceptable behaviours” show up in the home, in the community and in school (School administrator, 1999). However, quite often in focusing mainly on behavioural problems in these centres, the children’s and youths’ schooling was de-emphasized (l’Éducation de l’enfance en difficulté d’adaptation et d’apprentissage au Québec, 1976). The weakness in the Child Welfare programs caused by the lack of appropriate educational provisions was apparent by involved members of the educational sector (School administrator, 1999). So, in the mid 1970’s the Ministry of Social Affairs (the department responsible for Child Welfare

Services) appointed a committee to investigate the conditions and programs in the province's detentions and institutional facilities and to make recommendations (l'Éducation de l'enfance en difficulté d'adaptation et d'apprentissage au Québec, 1976). Manuel Batshaw spearheaded this committee (Batshaw Youth and Family Centres, 1999). The report from this investigation was later known as the l'Éducation de l'enfance en difficulté d'adaptation et d'apprentissage au Québec (1976) or in English, the Batshaw Report (1976). The Batshaw Report, submitted in 1976, was critical of the educational deficits of the children and youths in these facilities.

Remedial education was identified as a major area that needed attention. The report suggested that, although most of the children who entered these centres had major educational deficits, the various programs that existed offered little help in overcoming these difficulties (Rapport du Comité d'Etude sur la Réadaptation des Enfants et Adolescents Placés en Centre d'Accueil...1976). The Ministry of Social Affairs was then mandated to provide adequate educational programs for its clientele. From this report (1976) an entente was made between the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education (Appendix A). The conclusion of this report remains true today. Social Affairs schools essentially represents a mandated collaboration between education and child welfare services (Batshaw Report, 1976).

5.1 Social Affairs Schools

Social Affairs schools are education centres affiliated with the Child Welfare Agencies in Quebec (Batshaw unit manager, 1999; School administrator, 1999). The schools are usually placed in residential reception centres, but a few are housed in buildings of their own. The primary mandate of these schools is to provide education for youths in care (Rapport du Comité d'Etude sur la Réadaptation des Enfants et Adolescents Placés en Centre d'Accueil...1976). These institutions fall under the auspices of the Ministries of Social Welfare and Education of Quebec. The students in these educational institutions fall under the Youth Protection Act. This Act was introduced in 1977 as a process of intervention and prevention of any child "whose security and development may be considered to be in danger" and for "children who have committed an offence against any Act or regulation of Canada" (Youth Protection, 1977: 34).

This project mainly focuses on three schools in one of the Child Welfare Agencies in Quebec. The Agency is known as Batshaw Youth and family Centres. The schools that are the subjects of this study are placed in reception centres that serve the anglophone population of metropolitan Montreal, Quebec. Each school program is an integral part of the "treatment center" in which it is placed. The students' school program is usually centered on the psycho-social treatment in their units (Teacher, 1999). So as to respect the code of ethics involved in this project, I will provide anonymity of the schools by using pseudonyms in describing each one and its program.

I will call the schools in this project, the Suburban Alternative, St. Lawrence High School, and Northern High School.

5.2 The Suburban Alternative High School

The Suburban School is situated in one of the suburbs of Montreal. It is placed in one of the Agency's three residential campuses. The campus caters for about thirty-six boys and girls between the ages of eight to eighteen years old (School administrator, 1999). This campus operates in three units. One unit, houses twelve boys and the other two units house twelve girls each (Unit manager, 1999). The administrator suggested that, "The boys and girls who attend this school need a firmly structured and secured environment. At this point of their development, they are incapable of coping with the many decisions and temptations which confront every young person living in a normal environment." One teacher at the school suggests that, "Since they (students) need to live in a special environment under constant care and guidance, they could not possibly attend community schools." But, the Suburban School does not only serve the boys and girls who live in the residences on campus. It also serves quite a number of young people who live in group homes, foster homes and shelters, who are unable to be schooled in the community.

The school itself is housed in a remodeled elementary school. The building also houses many of the agency's offices. These offices are used by the campus administrators, the nurse and social workers who are attached to Batshaw Youth and Family Services. The section of the building that is used for teaching purposes has a wood shop, a computer lab, home economics kitchen, four regular

classrooms, a gym and an art room as well as an administrative area. The school staff consists of four teachers trained in the area of special education, a guidance counselor who works part time, a part time secretary, and a child-care worker. The principal of the Suburban Alternative School is also responsible for two other Social Affairs schools within the same school board.

The school register revealed that there were twenty students registered in this school program in 1999-2000 school year. According to the school secretary, the attendance stood between five to twenty students at any given time during that year. The social worker reported that the nature of this school's population is quite transient. The school administrator mentioned that students are admitted to and discharged from the program at any time during the year. Needless to say, the lack of special intake and discharge periods has greatly influenced the transient nature of the school. But as the social worker explained, "transiency is not peculiar to the Suburban School. It is common to all social affairs schools because admitting and discharging these students to and from schools is primarily dependent on the orders of the courts.

However, there are other reasons for the transient nature of students in this school other than the courts, which order them to leave school any time during the academic year. Barwick (1992) points out that transiency of these students may be the result of being kicked out of a community schools at any time during the academic year, or only just being referred to the agency or they were being re-integrated into a community school. Other factors may involve students who run away from residential units or group homes, or students who had committed a

delinquent act and had been adjudicated and court ordered to a more secure facility (Batshaw Youth and Family Services, 1999). According to the school administrator, the constant “revolving” doors of this and other social affairs schools tend to militate against the stability of the students’ educational progress.

The challenge for this school (as well as the others in this project) is to adequately respond to the constantly changing demographics and pluralism of its/their population. The students who attend these schools usually arrive there from a background of being tossed around in uncomfortable spheres of various public schools. Some of the students who participated in this study spoke of sitting in classrooms in public schools and feeling ignored and unwanted. Maxine Greene describes the experiences of such students the following way: “There have always been young persons in our classroom we did not, could not see or hear” (1993: 13).

The administrator and a teacher said that this school previously functioned on the high school model where students were grouped in grades and according to ability. The students would change classrooms each period to attend another course, but then, only high school students were accepted in the program. However, in response to the transient nature and diversity of the school’s population, the administrator refashioned the delivery of service to the students. The administrator suggested that the high school model is a duplication of regular schools and is therefore unsuitable for “special needs” students. This is his explanation: “When I came to this particular program, the elements for success were there without question! The teachers, I think that they were asked to duplicate the regular system, and I don’t think that in an alternate program there should be

duplication of what they get. I cannot understand when they say, 'he's having difficulty with English so instead of six periods we ought to give him nine periods.' This makes no sense to me! Here we have the ability to create. We have a Home Economics program. We have a Woodwork program. I got the elementary kids into the Woodwork program. This wasn't done here before. All of a sudden they are creating things, making birdhouses" (1999).

A School Programme Booklet (1991) indicated that the school offered courses in French, Mathematics, English and Social Studies to students in Grades 7, 8 and 9 at one time, but now it has added one group of elementary students from Grades 3 to 6. The present School Programme Booklet (1999) indicates that it also caters to a group of older students who are placed in a Work Study program. The Work Study program is intended for students 16 years of age or older who are not expected to graduate from high school after they leave the child welfare system. The program provides ways for students at risk of dropping out to stay in school until they develop job-related skills. The work study curriculum includes courses in wood shop, computers with word processing, and employment internship in the community. The students also receive courses in Business English, Business Math and Business French.

The school administrator pointed out that bells are dispensed with in the school. No longer are the beginning and the end of classes signaled by bells, because bells are viewed as distractions. Teachers in this school have an understanding with each other that if students are engrossed in a subject and desire more time than the period allows, then that class would be continued uninterrupted

by a bell. When classes exceed their allotted time, the students are required to make up for the lost time in the courses that were shortened.

Baum and her colleagues (1994) have demonstrated that inappropriate curriculum is a contributing factor to underachievement in schools – especially for “at risk” students. By remodeling and reshaping the school’s program, the administrator seemed to have accepted and confronted the challenge of plurality and multiplicity and responded to them in a way that Dewey called the “Great Community” (1954: 143ff).

In general, the school community appears to appeal to its students. One student indicated that the school appealed to him because there are “lots of interesting things to do that you can’t do in a normal school” (A student participant, 1999). The necessity of allowing students to have such experiences are emphasized by Maxine Greene (1993) as she writes, “To open up our experience (and yes our curricula) to existential possibilities of multiple kinds is to extend and deepen what we think of when we speak of community” (p. 15).

5.3 The St. Lawrence High School

The physical aspects of school life has received limited attention in research literature (Esbensen, 1990). It is generally assumed that the geography and the layout of school buildings are inconsequential to teachers (Sommer, 1977; Weikart, 1986). But Breinin (1987) reminds us that traditionally teachers’ voices have been silenced on such issues and that has not changed. Albeit, the location and the

building of the St. Lawrence High school appear to be well suited for the students who attend that school.

This school is situated in a beautifully designed two story, eight room, red brick house that faces the St. Lawrence River. It boasts a very scenic view of the river throughout the year. In the winter, the river is frozen and in the spring the view of the river thawing is usually spectacular. During the summer and the fall months, ducks are seen spending their days lazily floating on the water, while people carry out an inordinate amount of activities on the water - from boating to fishing. According to the Unit manager, such a picturesque scene appears to be well suited to the specialized program that is housed in this building.

The Unit manager described the program as being very specialized and housed in the format of a group home. It was developed originally to provide a short term, intensive therapeutic intervention for adolescents who had fallen through the cracks. The program is also described by the Unit manager, as especially designed to meet the needs of twelve to eighteen year olds who display suicidal tendencies or other “psychiatric” type of behaviours. Although all the students in this school program exhibit “psychiatric” type behaviours – including suicidal tendencies, they are not always able to find suitable accommodations in psychiatric facilities in Montreal (cited in *Intervention*, 1991). “The adolescents who attend this program do so because they did not meet the criteria of either the reception centre or the psychiatric units in the Montreal English speaking community” (Paré and Van Ausdal 1989: 34). Therefore, this program serves as a response to these students’ psychiatric and educational needs.

Unfortunately for Quebecers, they are not strangers to teen suicides. As was mentioned earlier in this thesis, Bedwani (2001) indicated that Quebec has the highest rate of teenage suicide in the country.

The full compliment of the unit is nine adolescents – boys and girls. The length of stay in this program is between three months to nine months.

The intervention plan in this unit is highly structured with the primary focus on therapy. There is a minimal amount of free time for the youngsters. The St. Lawrence School is a component of this treatment centre. Other components of this milieu include art therapy, family therapy and recreation. The school facilities are located in the basement of the building. There are three classrooms and 1.5 teachers. The full time teacher is in charge of the school program. She teaches Mathematics, English, the Social Sciences and Computer to students from Grade 7 through Grade 11, although infrequently a Grade 6 student may be accepted to the program. The part time teacher teaches French. The principal of the Suburban School also has the administrative responsibility for this school.

The school program is tightly interwoven into each student's treatment plan. The teacher attends treatment sessions with other professionals of the interdisciplinary treatment team in this program. Professional members of this team include child-care workers, a social worker, a psychologist, and sometimes the art therapist. In these meetings, Individual Educational Plans (IEP) and psycho-social plans are reviewed for each student. Everything that is related to the students' life revolves around their treatment plan.

5.4 The Northern High School

I have called this facility the Northern High School because it is located in the Laurentian Mountains. It is nestled among the pine trees and other evergreen plants in the mountain. The roads to the school are winding and can be quite treacherous in the winter. However, it is placed among some of the most coveted skiing areas in Quebec. Its location is a sharp contrast from the centres in the city. In winter, one can feast one's eyes on the beauty of untrodden snow and icicles hanging from the hills and trees. The view from the school is truly magnificent.

However, because it is about 50 km from Montreal, and the land it occupies is quite extensive, one can easily get a feeling of isolation. Historically, this institution was called the Boys' Farm and Training School. At that time children and youths who were runaways, orphans and delinquents were kept there. Various philanthropists from Montreal and its surrounding environments then financed the school. The students would do the work on the farm and were offered some basic education in reading, mathematics and writing. After a while, the campus was made to accommodate girls, a year before the fieldwork for this project was completed the girls' unit was transferred to the Suburban campus.

There are five units (or cottages as they are called) operating on this campus. Each cottage can accommodate ten students or ten beds. The administrator states, "I am working with a total of fifty-three beds between the five cottages, so that's just an average of ten beds – the rest is for "back-up." The term "back-up" refers to any place that the agency designates to put acting out children or youths, or those

students whose parents need a respite. The stay in a back-up facility is usually a short one – maximum three days.

The school is housed in a separate three story brick building on the campus. Administrative offices, the library, a kitchenette used by teachers, a washroom, and classrooms are found on the main floor. The upper floor of the school has classrooms and a washroom. The wood shop and the auto-mechanic shop are found on the first floor. The general high school program in the Régimes Pédagogiques, provided by the Ministry of Education, forms the basis of the educational program in this school.

In the three schools small classes maximize students opportunity for success. The student-teacher ratio is 8:1. However, it is not uncommon to find classes with two or three students with one teacher at times in these schools.

A higher proportion of “hands on” or physical activity serves to promote positive attitude about schooling and self. One teacher explains, “I think you need more vocational studies or programs where they will learn a skill or a trade. Have something where they will go into a trade...It’s very hands on, experimental and visual. Being in a wood shop allows that to occur.” The Northern School offers courses in auto mechanic, woodwork and Home Economics. The Suburban School offers a similar vocational program, but it excludes auto mechanics. The St. Lawrence School does not have the facilities to offer a vocational program.

5.5 PROVISION OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

Although the academic programs in these schools are closely linked to the Régimes Pédagogiques of Quebec (Curriculum Regulations), the administrator of each school “tailors” the program to meet the specific needs of its clientele. But, according the administrators of the social affairs schools, the executive members of the agency closely monitor the educational services rendered to the students who attend social affairs schools that are under the auspices of Batshaw. The executive members of the agency review each of the proposed educational plans before these services are offered. If the proposed plan is acceptable to the agency, it is instituted, but if it is found to be disagreeable then the necessary adjustments are made.

The School Programme Booklet (1999) reveals that there are five major categories of student needs addressed by the programs in these schools. However, students individual problems often overlap into several or all of the following areas:

- ❖ Truancy and Long term Absence
- ❖ Learning Disabled
- ❖ Emotionally Disturbed
- ❖ Behaviourally Disturbed – Acting Out
- ❖ Work Study

The schools address the various needs of their students through the use of Individualized Educational Plans and Individualized Treatment Plans. These Plans are frequently reviewed and prescriptions revised. Some of the prescribed treatments include small classes, compact facilities and structure to help students who are truants to relearn school routines and behaviours. Close supervision is also prescribed. Coping academic strategies and individualized instruction are prescribed for students who are diagnosed as learning disabled. The aim is to help them to overcome their deficits. For the students who are behaviourally disturbed programs are designed to help them gain stability and self-control. To accomplish this, small classes, individualized attention, counseling from guidance counselors and psychologists are prescribed.

In the Work Study program, the students are given the opportunity to learn work place skills. So as to facilitate this venture, orientation to work is offered at the Suburban and Northern schools, while “stage” placements are offered at the Suburban School. Social workers, child-care workers and residential unit managers support all prescribed programs.

5.5.1 Intervention plans in the schools

Intervention plans are put in place on each campus for students who attend social affairs schools. Students who live in these settings follow a well-structured program both in the residences and in school. They are expected to adhere to their schedule and attend classes. They are expected to obey the rules and regulations of the institution or they will suffer the consequences. In each school, when a student is too disruptive in a class, that student is removed from the class. Each school

addresses this problem in its own way. At the Suburban School, the student is sent to the Planning Room where a child-care worker receives him or her. The student and the child-care worker will review the problem that took place in the class. The child care-worker then helps the student to think of a “plan” that would prevent a repetition of the problem that took place in the class.

When the student has written a plan, the student and the child-care worker review or “process” the plan with the teacher in whose class the problem had occurred. The student then signs the plan (if it is acceptable), and is then held accountable for what he/she had written and signed. The student then returns to his/her class immediately. This method of behaviour intervention is termed, “Planing Process.” The Planning Process Model originates from William Glasser’s Reality Theory (1969). Basic to Realty Theory is the belief that all human behaviour is our constant attempt to satisfy our basic needs. Glasser refutes the stimulus – response theory and argues that we “act” to satisfy a need as opposed to responding to a stimulus. So students are encouraged to clearly examine the need they were trying to satisfy when the problem erupted. Then they are asked to find the best solution to the problem – one that would avoid disrupting the class.

However, should the student have difficulty in writing a plan or does not want to cooperate, that student is sent back to the unit (residence). The school day is then suspended for that student until he/she is ready to cooperate by looking at ways to solve the problem that took place in class.

In the St. Lawrence School, when a student becomes too disruptive in class, the student is asked to leave the class. If the student refuses to leave, a child-care

worker escorts him/her from the class. The worker and student discuss the problem that took place in the class. At this point, the student's treatment plan is reviewed and steps in that plan are put into place. The student is directed to "look at" the problem and work it through by using the treatment plan that was prescribed for him/her. The students in this school are not allowed to leave any class and return to their rooms. Whatever difficulties arise in class it is dealt with immediately and the student is reinstated in class shortly afterwards.

The Model used in this school is described in Barwick's (1992) study as the Psycho-Educational Model of Child Welfare Care. In this model the emphasis is placed on the behavioural and social problems of each student. To this end, before student/client is admitted to the program, family and individual interviews are conducted, and the student is assessed with instruments intended to uncover his/her level of anxiety, depression and deviance. A team of health professionals reviews the results of the assessment and then makes recommendations. The team may recommend either accepting an individual to the program or rejecting him or her. If the student is admitted to the program then a "treatment plan" is prescribed for him/her very shortly after admittance. This treatment plan incorporates individual and family therapy with a view to resolving the family problems that the team feels initiated the child welfare referral.

One administrator explained that when the students first arrive on campus they generally harbour a dislike for school. So the receiving school gives this factor serious consideration in the preparation of each student's intervention plan. "Sometimes they (the students) come in with the outlook that if they could

get thrown out (of school), then they could go back to the cottage and spend the day in the cottage and avoid school.” Emphasis is therefore placed on persuading the students to go to school, not because it is expected of them, but as the administrator said, “maybe something good might happen for them to stay.” For some students, staying the entire day in school is an achievement in itself. The school day is usually condensed for these students with a view to gradually increasing the time spent in school. For the most part these students are unable to cope with the strain of attending six classes from 9 O’clock in the morning to 3: 10 in the afternoon. Coping with school rules and following teachers’ instructions are other difficulties that these students experience.

The intervention plan in the Northern High School takes the form of a Stimulus → Response Behaviour Modification model (advanced by many behaviourists, for example, Franks and Wilson, 1973). In this model each cottage of ten students has a liason teacher. The liason teacher generally carries out the functions of a homeroom teacher and supports the students in his or her cottage throughout the school day. Each student carries a point sheet to all the classes and are encouraged to earn a maximum of three points per class period. The points are accumulated for a reward at the end of each week. The reward system is worked out between each cottage and its liason teacher. At the end of the week, the maximum points that each student can earn is ninety. These points are then traded in for material rewards of the students’ choice. As a reward, the students may choose to have a coke or to rent a movie to be watched in the cottage.

When students are experiencing difficulty staying in class in this school, they are asked to leave the class immediately. They are sent back to their cottages and the school day for them is then suspended. Very little problem solving appears to take place between the teachers and students here. The students re-entry into school usually depends on the teachers' sanction. For example, a teacher may suggest that a student who violated a rule in his/her class does not return to school (not merely for his/her class) until that student meets with the principal and teacher with whom the student had the infraction. However, this meeting may not be able to take place for many days because of the principal's or teacher's schedule. While an appropriate time is being sought for this meeting to take place, the student stays in the cottage – for the most part being bored and frustrated. Although teachers usually provide school work for students when they are suspended, very rarely are the assignments completed and even more infrequently are they returned to the teachers. On these occasions, the students usually complain that they do not understand the assignment and could get no help in the cottages because the child-care workers could not do the work either. Students are not permitted to leave any of the three campuses by themselves during school time.

TABLE 1

**SOCIAL AFFAIRS SCHOOLS: INTERVENTION
MODELS**

SUBURBAN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

Reality Theory and Control Theory (William Glasser, 1969 and 1986)

Planning Process Model

ST. LAWRENCE HIGH SCHOOL

Psycho-educational Model of Child Welfare Care (Barwick, 1992)

Students' psychological and social assessment is combined with Individual Educational Plan (IEP) to make a Treatment Plan

NORTHERN HIGH SCHOOL

Stimulus → Response Model (Advanced by many behaviourist, e.g Franks and Wilson, 1973). Behaviour Modification – Accumulated points for good behaviour. The points are then traded in for material rewards.

CHAPTER 6

RESEARCH DESIGN

6.1 METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach – a narrative design is consistent with the intent of this study. The study aims to listen to students' views on their interpretation of success and how they think they can remain in school, and be successful. It is my opinion that a qualitative approach is best suited for this project, because this approach is designed to understand social phenomena from the participants' perspectives. The orientations and traditions of the qualitative approach are embodied in the reflexive and interpretative paradigms (Agger, 1992). In qualitative research, as Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) state, "Reflexivity implies that the orientations of researchers will be shaped by their socio-historical locations, including the values and interests that these locations confer upon them" (p. 16). Woods (1983) suggests that the central concern of the interpretative approach is how people construct meanings through interaction with each other. The meanings then become people's reality. These notions are of immense importance to this study in my attempt to give voice to a group of students who need to be heard. This therefore, has helped to heighten my interest in choosing this design.

This project does not merely give a statistical account of the high school dropout phenomenon, but produces narratives of those students who are direct stakeholders in the problem. Dei, et al. (1997) suggest that, "Studies that rely on

statistics to portray a picture of dropouts do not provide – and they are not meant to provide - either the researcher or observer with the reason or actual experiences of those involved” (p. 32). It is my view that the qualitative approach has the advantage of preserving the individual stories and emphasising some of the common threads of shared experiences.

Within the qualitative approach, I also employed the narrative technique. I favour this technique because as Lancy (1993) states, it allows for, “the importance of describing in very personal terms the researcher’s history vis-à-vis this particular topic” (p. 22). Narratives also allow for the participants’ voice to be heard. In expressing this view, McLaren writes: “Each voice is shaped by its owner’s particular cultural history and prior experience” (1994: 227).

6.1.1 Narratives

Carter (1993) suggests that narrative has become a central focus for conducting research. It has “caught on with considerable enthusiasm throughout the intellectual world and is beginning to appear in widely different context” (p. 5). For example, in psychology, Bruner (1985) refers to a narrative mode of thought, and Sarbin (1986) proposes story as a “root metaphor” for the study of human conduct. In education, scholars such as Coles and Knowles (1992), Clandinin and Connelly (1992), Elbaz (1991), Richert (1990) and McLaren (1994) have made story or narrative, a central element in their analyses of teacher’s knowledge and students’ lived experiences. Mitchell (1981) also notes that “the study of narratives is no longer the province of literary specialists or folklorists... but now has become a positive source of insight for all branches of human and natural science” (p. ix).

Carter (1993) suggests that “stories are not merely raw data from which to construct interpretations, but are products of a fundamentally interpretive process that is shaped by the moralistic impulses of the author and by narrative forces or requirements. And these interpret elements operate regardless of who the author is” (p. 9). Such a perspective underscores the centrality of interpretation in the study of students at risk, while at the same time, it calls into question any pretensions to a special agenda in this area.

I am very conscious of the many issues such as interpretation, value and purpose that surround the use of narratives or stories as the central method for conducting research. But my special attraction to this methodology is grounded in the notion that narratives represent a way of knowing and thinking. Cater (1993) suggests that this type of knowing and thinking, “is particularly suited to explicating the issues with which we deal” (p. 6). For me, the use of narrative methodology will offer a mode of knowing that captures in a special way the richness and nuances of meaning in the life of high school students at risk of dropping out, and their interpretations of school success. “This richness and nuance cannot be expressed in definitions, statements, or abstract propositions. It can only be demonstrated or evoked by stories” (Cater, 1993:6). Martin (1986) notes that, “narratives, no matter how prepared with generalizations, always provide more information or food for thought than they have digested” (p. 187).

Finally, I concur with Peshkin’s (1993) views as he writes, “I think we would benefit from ‘stories’ of the several types of persons who participate in the educational enterprise. I visualize biographies, life histories...or case

studies...addressing for example, students ‘at risk’; students who by all rights shouldn’t have succeeded, but did; students with gifts and students with handicaps” (p. 25). From my vantage point then, Nel Noddings’ (1991) claim that “stories have the power to change our lives” (p. 157) looms very high.

6.1.2 Sources of Data

The data for this study was collected from various sources. The primary source of the data came from the students who completed a questionnaire and were interviewed. For the purpose of triangulation, the views of adults who provide services to these students were also very important to this study, therefore the principal of each school, teachers, social workers and child-care workers were also interviewed. A principal and a social counselor from a regular public school were also interviewed for the purpose of triangulation. The researcher also gathered information from academic journals, books, magazines, government documents, computer search, and newspapers.

6.1.3 Participants

The criterion for involvement in this study was based on the students’ school performance. Each selected student had failed at least one grade in the past, and at the time the fieldwork was being conducted, was experiencing difficulty in school. Administrators, teachers, social workers and unit managers were asked to help with the selection process. All the students who were selected participated.

Initially, the researcher had planned to interview a total of forty students from four schools. However, the students from one school were unable to participate

because they did not conform to the regulations necessary to conduct a study as this one. From the three remaining schools, eighteen students participated. The participants were selected from Grades 7 through 11. The composition of the student participants was sixteen boys and two girls. They were from different racial and social backgrounds. Eleven adults were also interviewed for this study. The adults included the administrators and some teachers from the three schools and social workers, child-care workers and unit managers from the three campuses. One administrator and social counselor from a public high school were also interviewed.

6.1.4 General characteristics of participants

Students “in care” and those who are wards of the court are placed either for committing delinquent acts, or for their own protection. They are therefore, unable to be maintained in regular educational programs for one or more reasons. These students are usually characterized as:

- Having behaviour problems (oppositional, defiant, aggressive) too difficult for community school to handle.
- Disliking school intensely (truancy, school alienation).
- Failure in keeping conditions of legal or social contracts.
- Having experienced failure in school (repeating grades).

Gold and Mann (1976), Massimo and Shore (1963), Stinchcombe (1964) and Ovsold (1976) have also suggested that, youths “in care” generally commit delinquent acts. They usually lack motivation, are truants and excessively aggressive towards peers and adults, mistrust others, have a low level of tolerance, are unable to ask for help or express emotion, have low self-esteem, and usually are experiencing

difficulties in the home. The presence of low academic achievement in this population is also consistent with other reports on the characteristics of youths “in care” (Barwick, 1992).

One teacher from the Suburban School stated that, “The kids that come in to this school have trouble with the law, they have trouble with their parents. They basically have trouble with everyone whom they come in contact with.” While the administrator from the Northern School describes the students this way:

They are frustrated. They have difficulties in peer and social relations – difficulties making friends. They have low fuses...They have the potential to explode – very angry. Educationally, there is a very wide variety of characteristics. There are good ones who have experienced success in school and are fairly well on line with where they should be – age appropriate and grade (appropriate). There are other ones that are quite weak. They have a problem generally with authority figures, because authority figures have been telling them what to do for many years, and in most cases have not been very successful. Some of them, depending on their family history have problems with female role or the male role. They have a lot of emotional disturbances and that’s usually reflected in their attitude in the classroom or towards a teacher. It’s very important for them to save face when they’re being disciplined, or if they get into a conflict situation with a student doing something. Chances are – the student will win. They will not bend.

For the most part the students to whom I spoke in this study agreed with the general negative description of their characteristics. However, they suggest that they also have some positive qualities. One student described himself this way, “I’ve been manipulative. I can be cruel, but on the other hand I’m also a nice person and I have compassion for a lot of people.”

A Batshaw Youth and Family Centres Board of Directors Report (1999) expresses the notion that the schools draw their population from a gamut of socio-economic, racial and cultural groups. However, most of them come from disadvantaged backgrounds. One agency administrator suggests that poverty,

dysfunctional families, racism and violence are reflected in the clientele of youth in care. The youngsters in care comprise the population of social affairs schools.

6.1.5 Instruments

A questionnaire and interviews were the instruments used. The reason for choosing these instruments is consistent with my desire to learn from high school students who are potential dropouts what their views are about school success.

The questionnaire for this project was designed to provide a wide range of information on the students who participate in this study. Some of the information received from the questionnaire was used as the basis for follow-up questions in the interview process. The questionnaire was also designed to facilitate quick and concise written responses to the students' personal and family background (Appendix B).

The questionnaire had a total of eighteen questions. These questions were divided into the following themes:

- Personal Information
- Home Environment
- Family's Level of Education and Income.

The interviews allowed me to share in the participants' experiences of "success" and "failures" in a natural way and better understand how they view and make sense of their lives. The lives of high school students who are at risk of dropping out of school are unique to them. It is only they who could have described how it feels, what it is like and how changes can be made in their favour. In other words, they alone could have constructed and expressed their reality through words that are based on their lived experiences.

Interviewing as a research tool, is flexible and adaptable (McMillan and Schumacher, 1984). Gay (1993) suggests that the interviewing process can be used with many different types of persons, such as those who are underachieving in school. Gay (1993) expresses a number of factors in supporting interviewing as a research tool. He writes, "The interview is flexible; the interviewer can adapt the situation to each subject. By establishing rapport and a trust relationship, the interviewer can often obtain data that subjects would not give on a questionnaire" (p. 262). I also concur with Seidman (1992) who suggests that:

In-depth interviewing strength is that through it we can come to understand the details of people's experience from their point of view. We can see how their individual experience interacts with powerful social and organizational forces that pervade the context in which they live and work, and we can discover interconnections among people who live and work in a shared context. (p. 103)

Three sets of interview guides were prepared for this project. One set was prepared for the students (Appendix C). The second set was prepared for child-care workers, social workers and unit managers (Appendix D), and the third set was for teachers and school administrators (Appendix E). The questions were all open-ended and were used as a guide, not rigidly followed. The guide for teachers and administrators had a total of eighteen questions, there were sixteen questions in the guide for social workers, child-care workers and unit managers, while the interview guide for students was divided into the following five categories:

- Student's School Profile - 20 questions
- Role Models - 4 questions
- Friends - 9 questions
- Students' Future Plans - 7 questions
- Personal Assessment - probing for student's own meaning of success, and their view of how school can help them to succeed.

6.2 PROCEDURE

6.2.1 Research Ethics

In keeping with the ethical requirements of McGill University for conducting research with minors, this researcher received a signed consent from the parents or guardians of each participant before the fieldwork began (Appendix F). Permission was received from the Ethics Committee of McGill University to conduct this study (Appendix G). Participants in this study were involved strictly on a voluntary basis. When the researcher met with the selected students she informed them of their rights to refuse involvement in the project. Students who agreed to participate were also informed that they were free to withdraw from the study at any stage without any form of penalty, and they were also free to refuse to have their interviews tape-recorded. All the participants gave the researcher permission to have the interviews tape-recorded. Participants were also assured that their identity would remain confidential.

6.2.2 Conducting the research

Before embarking on this study, the researcher sought permission from Sir Wilfred Laurier, Lester B. Pearson, the English Montreal School Boards and Batshaw Youth and Family Centres to conduct this investigation. The Department of Student Affairs of one school board had a meeting with the researcher and requested minor changes to the questionnaire. Although the changes were made to satisfy that school board, its school was unable to participate in the study because the students had

difficulty in complying with McGill University code of ethics for research. The other two boards granted permission without any stipulations.

The fieldwork for this project began on May 17, 1999 through June 7, 1999. The interviews with the students took place during school hours, but the interviews with the adults were conducted at a later date. The adults were interviewed between June 15 and September 21, 1999.

The researcher met with each participant individually in his/her school to conduct the interviews. All interviews were conducted individually and were recorded on tape. The average length of each interview is sixty minutes. At the Northern School some interviews with the students were conducted in a classroom on the main floor. This classroom is used for French. When the French classroom was unavailable, the interviews were conducted on the third floor. This classroom was used for social studies. Both classrooms were quite adequate and convenient for the purpose of conducting the interviews. All the adults in that school were interviewed in the administrator's office.

Interviews at the St. Lawrence School were conducted in an office that was used by the general staff. Although the view from the window of the office was beautiful, the location had several disadvantages. The days were hot, but the windows had to be kept shut during the interviewing periods to keep out the disturbances of noises from passers by and vehicles. There were also a few interruptions from the ringing of the telephone in that office. However, the participants were very willing to talk. They gave serious considerations to the questions that were asked before they answered. When they were unsure about a

question, they would unhesitatingly ask for explanation. For the most part, it appeared that they enjoyed talking about themselves. One student thanked the researcher for speaking with her, because she found the exercise to be therapeutic.

The session with the student participant from the Suburban School was conducted in a classroom that appeared as if it was once used as an art room. It appeared to have been unused for some time because the desks were laden with dust. However, we were able to clean off two desks and then worked without any further disturbance during the interviewing process.

At the beginning of the interviewing exercise, the researcher engaged the student participants in an informal conversation in order to relax them, but most of all to gain their confidence and trust. The researcher also used this time to explain what the project was about, to assure them that their rights would be respected, they could withdraw from the project at any time, and their identity would remain confidential. From my experience with this population of students, they love to talk, and enjoy having an audience. To top it off, they saw this event as being advantageous to them, because of the opportunity to miss some classes. These conversations lasted between ten to fifteen minutes.

After our initial conversation, each participant was given a questionnaire and a pencil. When the conversation began to wane, the researcher worked with each participant on the completion of the questionnaire. The researcher read the questions and asked each participant to fill in his/her answers. Helping them to read the questionnaire was important for most of the students because it avoided embarrassment with reading and comprehension. There are eighteen personal

questions on the questionnaire, and the time for the completion of this exercise was about fifteen minutes.

Once the questionnaire was completed the interview session began. At this time, the participants were not required to write. The researcher used the open-ended questions from the Interview Guide to encourage the students to tell her about themselves. Our conversations were recorded on tape. The researcher did not want to interrupt the flow of conversation, or the participant's train of thought, so very short notes were taken during the interviewing sessions. These sessions lasted between thirty to forty-five minutes. For the most part, the students were very talkative and expressed themselves freely during the interview process. At the end of each interview session, the participating student was asked to return to his/her class.

All the interview tapes (those of the students and adults) were transcribed by the researcher shortly after each session to ensure that most of the information revealed by the participants was captured, and very little was lost. There were thirteen interview tapes, which were transcribed into 491 handwritten pages. Later all the handwritten work was typed on to the computer, using a word processor.

6.3 DATA ANALYSIS

Data were filed in a number of ways. Data from the questionnaires were organized into groups such as the respondents' gender, number of schools previously attended, age, grade level, etc.

The researcher employed *the constant comparative method* to analyze the data from the interviews. This method is non-mathematical in its procedure and is

designed to identify themes and categories in qualitative studies. In this case, the data was broken into smaller pieces that were compared for commonalties and differences. The data from this research was broken down by sentences from each response and each item that was represented was given a name or a theme. The categories were formed by the groupings of the commonalties found in each theme.

Responses from the interviews were filed according to themes, categories within themes, similarities, paradoxes and poignant differences. The researcher typed and printed all the transcripts then wrote short hand notes in the margin of every one next to every response. The notes were colour coded according to the themes as they emerged. For example, Teachers emerged as a theme because every student suggested that teachers played a major role in his/her school life. All responses that involved teachers were then underlined in the notes with a pink marker. Themes were written as headings on a separate note pad. Each heading was colour coded. The researcher then revisited each transcript and filed the appropriate notes under each heading. The pages where information on each theme was located were also colour coded thematically.

Matching colours of sticky paper was used as labels for each theme. Each labeled sticky paper was attached to the side of the page in the note pad with the matching theme. This process was used to help the researcher in accessing each theme easily as the notes were written. At the end of this process the sorted themes with their categories were transferred to the computer. After revisiting the notes, responses of categories that were better suited under another theme other than the

one in which they were first placed were moved around by cutting and pasting. This was facilitated by the use of a word processor.

The files for themes and categories within the themes that became the final divisions of the analysis were created as they naturally emerged from studying the students' perception of school - school success. Their interests, activities in which they are involved and their relationship with others were also studied. For example, after studying the transcripts the quality and quantity of data surrounding the students' perception of "public schools" warranted its creation as a theme. Categories within the theme such as large classes and students' feelings that they do not belong were created as they became evident to the researcher. The themes and categories within themes were studied and an analytical statement was written based on excerpts from the transcripts that lends credence to the analysis.

Since the emphasis of this study is placed on giving voice to the students, the analysis of the adult interviews were not reported in one place, but they are dispersed throughout the results of the study. The views of the adults have been invaluable to this project as sources of information, and for substantiating or refuting some education and social dogma.

6.3.1 Individual case synopses

Bennett and LeCompte (1995) suggest that most sociologists in education tend to examine all aspects of schooling, "except for the students for whom school is intended... the voices of students simply have not been heard, even to describe what schools mean to them" (1995: 84). As we shall see in the following case synopses, how students actually view school often diverges from what educators

would prefer. These case synopses are stories from the individual voices of the students. In working through each transcript, the researcher focused on the concerns, expectations and the needs of the respondents as they were revealed. The researcher also focused on how the lived experiences of the students impacted on their success or failure in school. These included the respondents' thoughts, feelings, and events in which they were involved.

Excerpts or fragments of passages from individual interviews were chosen on the basis of the following response:

- How do students view success?
- What is students' perception of school in relationship to success?
- How can schools help students to succeed?
- What is student's perception of how schools can help potential dropouts to stay in school?

Excerpts were also chosen on the basis of the researcher's judgment. As the researcher, I conducted the interviews, transcribed the tapes, studied each transcript, reviewed and studied the related literature, and wrestled with the data for many months, as such I made the selection based on my judgment.

The stories are written in the students' own words or in very close approximation to them. For the most part, each respondent's story follows closely to the conversation we had during the interview. The case synopses vary in length due to the duration of each interview and the researcher's decision as to what is essential to each story. However, all of the stories are of equal importance, none is

inferior to the other. After all, they are the “voice” of the students who are at risk of dropping out of high school.

6.3.2 Validity, reliability and generalization

McMillan and Schumacher (1984) state that, “Validity is the extent to which inferences are made on the basis of the data collected, are appropriate, meaningful, and useful” (p. 23). Reliability has traditionally been taken for granted as a necessary but insufficient condition for validity in assessment use (Moss, 1994). Reliability, as it is typically defined and operationalized in the measurement literature (e.g., American Research Association, American Psychological Association and National Council and Measurement in Education, 1985; Feldt and Brennan, 1989), gives privileges to standardized forms of assessment. It would appear then, that validity, reliability and generalizability are accepted features of the checks and balances in the domain of quantitative studies (McMillan and Schumacher, 1997). Some adherents of qualitative research approaches are not convinced of the necessity to specifically establish validity, reliability, and generalizability in their studies (Eisner, 1991; Peshkin, 1993). The challenge to define and establish checks for validity, reliability and generalizability in qualitative research is pushed in part by the positivist tradition. As such, the members of the qualitative community almost completely agree that in qualitative research and the evaluation there are no absolute tests for validity and reliability. There also, can be no definite list of questions that must be addressed to establish an investigator’s credibility (Carspecken, 1995; Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Eisner, 1991; LeCompte and Goetz, 1986).

Qualitative approaches also place a high premium on the influence of the researcher. Unlike a quantitative study that views replicability as essential for validity, a qualitative study recognizes the importance of the researcher's point of view. Wilson (1977) points out that, "The Qualitative research enterprise depends on the ability of the researcher to make himself a sensitive research instrument by transcending his own perspectives of those he is studying" (p. 261). The view that the qualitative researcher has an obligation to be methodical in reporting sufficient details of the data collection and the process of analysis to permit others to judge the quality of the study is shared by many in the qualitative research community (Patton, 1990). Qualitative research takes on a personal character, as subjectivity is one of the key factors in this type of study. However, Fraenkel and Wallen (1993) caution that "complete subjectivity undermines credibility" (p.382).

As a researcher, my interpretation tries to give meaning to the students' words, but the narratives of the lives and experiences that become data for this project must be viewed as interpretations from the standpoint of the participants. My main goal is to understand the "world" of students who are at "risk" of dropping out of high school, and not to prove anything or advance a personal agenda. The stories that the students tell are carefully selected, in order to include personal experience and emphatic insight as an important part of the data. Since the phenomenon is being investigated by personal accounts, the validity of this study is dependent on the accuracy of what was said and meant by each respondent. When the researcher was in doubt of what was being said, the tape of the interview was played repeatedly until a clear understanding was reached. When a word or a phrase by a respondent could

not be positively understood, the transcript indicated such with a blank line or question mark. Due to the transitive nature of these students, the researcher was unable to review the transcripts with any of them for accuracy.

The study represents potential high school dropouts in Social Affairs schools. While the study is about potential dropouts in English schools, it may not be generalizable, as these institutions do not represent traditional public schools in a wider sense. The public school systems in Canada provide for a much larger population than the schools selected for this project. Public schools cater for students with much wider range of intellectual abilities, emotional and ethnocultural differences. Structural features of the selected schools, school climate and other external factors may impact on the study. However, students who are at risk of dropping out of high school will most likely be able to relate to some of the stories and lived experiences from this project. It is through those relationships that generalities could appear. The accepted position therefore, is that the validity and reliability of qualitative data depend to a great extent on the skill, sensitivity, and integrity of the researcher.

6.3.3 Triangulation

The researcher employed triangulation as a method for checking validity and reliability. “Triangulation means two or more fixed or sightings of a finding from different angles” (Delamont, 1992: 159). Delamont (1992) identifies three main types of triangulation – between method, between investigators, and within method. Two of these types must be filled to satisfy validity and reliability of a research.

Between method triangulation means the collection of data with the use of more than one method. The use of two instruments – questionnaires and interviews, also satisfied this method.

Between investigators requires two or more researchers studying the same phenomenon. I was also able to fulfil this requirement as I conducted in-depth interviews with adults who provide services for the students. The principal of each school under study, teachers, social workers and child-care workers were interviewed. A principal and a social counselor from a regular public high school were also interviewed for the purpose of triangulation.

I have also received feedback from many scholars and researchers whose primary interest lies in the area of “children with special needs.” I have presented papers dealing with the topic of this study at the Comparative International Educational Society conferences in San Antonio in 2000, and in Washington, DC in 2001. At these conferences I received critical feedback from some scholars.

Within method triangulation involves systematically attempting to gather different kinds of data on a topic within method. Collecting the data from the questionnaires and interviews satisfied this method. For example, I was able to compare respondents written answers to questions on the questionnaire with their verbal responses. I was also able to identify particular responses on the questionnaires that were worth further exploration, and elicit more detailed information in the interview that followed.

The following chapter is an analysis of the students’ voice. The emphasis of this chapter is placed on illuminating the lived experiences of individual students so

as to allow each student to tell his/her own story. Therefore, Chapter seven is written as part of the analysis of the thesis. The stories that are told in that chapter, are not any kind of stories, but in everyone individual students speaks of past experiences and envisions his/her future. Each story constructs the student's ideals and prescribes the rules, by which he/she lives and plays. Every story in the thesis, through its own merit provides a source of authority and above all gives a sense of each student's purpose and continuity. This comprehensive narrative gives an account of how each student in the research project perceives the world through his/her life experience, how the way things got to be the way they are for each one of them, and the aspiration of each student's future.

CHAPTER 7

FROM THEIR OWN VOICE: INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS (Part 1)

This chapter resonates with the sound of each student's voice. The following synopses are the stories from the individual voices of the students in this study. Each voice tells its own story, depicting his or her lived experiences. The selected stories are poignant with emotions as they reveal the students' innermost thoughts and feelings. The stories also give insights into the life of each student and share with us the students' despair of past failures and their fear of future ones. But they also speak to us of the students' hopes and aspirations for future school success and by extension – success in life. The voices of these students resound with clarity their perception of the reasons for past school failures and their view of the help they need to have so that they can achieve success in school.

Although this chapter may appear to be mostly descriptive (or a presentation of raw data), the stories that are presented are edited. Thus, the presentation of the students' voices is influenced by my selection of what is relevant to this dissertation and what should be left out. According to Carter (1993), stories are not merely raw data from which to construct interpretations, but are also products of a fundamentally interpretive process that is shaped by the author.

I have used categories to analyse the students' voices by including inserts to separate them from the main text in this chapter. The inserts that are placed in boxes are comparisons between the various students in each section. As such, I have engaged both in interpreting and analysing the students' voices while allowing their stories to receive the prominence I intend them to have in this study. The

voices of the adult participants are heard throughout this dissertation and are not reported in any one area of the analysis.

7.1 Student 1

Student 1 is a 14 year old boy who is in Grade 7. He says that he is repeating Grade 7 because “I came into school late and I was out of school for a pretty long time. I missed lots of school so I wasn’t able to catch up.” He was born in Canada, but does not know his biological parents because he was adopted. He has changed his residence three times in five years and has attended four different schools in the same amount of time. In his fourteen years, he has lived in a shelter, group home and a residential centre because he said, “I won’t listen to my mother.” He describes himself as a, “good person” because “I like to make people happy.” When he was asked to talk about himself as a student, he indicated that he tries hard in school sometimes, but he finds the work hard. “Sometimes, I listen a lot in school. I like math and geography, but sometimes it’s very hard.”

When he was questioned about his views of the school he was then attending, he stated that he liked it:

“ I like this school. I think a lot of it for sure!
Just nice teachers, lots of interesting things to do that you can’t do in a normal school.”

Woodwork and Home Economics were the two courses he mentioned that gave him the most pleasure at that school. However, he laments the lack of freedom that exists there and said:

“Normally, I’m not free so I can’t go to the store if I want to at lunch time. That’s this school, but at a normal school you could go off campus. You could go to the store if you want to. You could go to the store to eat lunch. Here, you have to eat

lunch in school and stay in view all the time. You can't run around the campus. That's why I don't like it at this school."

This student did not like public schools because he found them too big and he suggested that the teachers in those schools are uncaring. Here are his words:

"They're (public schools) are big. You can get lost in them very easily. And if you don't get lost, you can't find the place you are looking for. If you are looking for a classroom, you can't even find it. I couldn't find the cafeteria once."

The student was asked to describe his view of success and he responded this way:

"It means doing well, never giving up. Like if I want to do something, I would never give up unless I know it was totally impossible to achieving nothing. If you try hard enough you can do it, so I will never give up! ...Never give up; always try until you succeed!"

The student explained that he likes to build and fix electronic objects. Success for him therefore, lies in the satisfactory completion of any object that he has pulled apart and then put together again, or something that he has built for himself. This student appears to have found the joy of intrinsic learning. This is how he describes his success:

"I like taking things apart and then putting them back together. I took all night to fix my calculator. No matter how long it took I would be fixing it. No matter how long it took, I would keep on trying. I can also build stuff. I built a car with a 9 volt battery and a tigo motor. You know those cars that can run on a track? I hooked up a 9 volt battery to it and then it started racing. I bought the parts from Radio Shack."

The student then commented that if he did not enjoy working on something, he would not want to spend his time on it. "I really wouldn't want to do it. But I'm good at fixing things for sure," said he. He is not quite sure, but he thinks that his present school offers him an opportunity to achieve some form of success because, "my woodwork teacher helps me with my wood."

He chooses Jim Carrey (comedian and movie actor) to be his role model because he is funny and demonstrates resilience in his pursuit of success. He states his admiration for Jim Carrey like this:

“I watch Jim Carrey and he would always try. He would never give up. That’s how he got to where he is. He’s never given up. He tries his best. So when he does impressions he’s always practising. He’d never give up, and that’s why he is always succeeding in something big.”

In the discussion regarding his future plans, the student remarked that he was going to return to a public school during the ensuing year. He suggested that the public schools he had previously attended had tried to help him, but he fell behind in his schoolwork. The reason for this, he explains, was because “I was changing schools, because I kept moving.” He states that he would like to graduate from high school and then try to go to college so that he “can do something in computer.” He plans to work hard in school so that he can achieve this goal. However, he admits that he has problems with some schoolwork. For example, he says, “Most of my problems are writing slow, so I would need to ask people (teachers) to like slow down for me. I also have problems learning subjects that I don’t know. French is my hardest one.”

In the future, the student would like to earn a lot of money. However, he had difficulty in explaining numerically how much a “lot of money” means to him. This is what a lot of money means to him:

“If you work with computers you can make lots of money...tens of thousands. Lots of money, because people who work for Bill Gates they probably make lots of money.”

The student did not indicate to the researcher that he had received any special help for the difficulties he was experiencing while he attended the regular schools. However, he did not blame the schools for his failures. Instead, he suggested that

he didn't feel good when he failed, "but I was thinking that I should have worked harder, but that wasn't really my fault because I wasn't in the schools long enough. But I think I should have tried harder anyway."

On the matter of friendship, the student revealed that he has some friends who are in placement. Most of them do not like school and plan to drop out as soon as they are 16 years old. They often skip school and hang around the mall because they find school boring. His closest friends are a Greek boy and a Chinese boy. When he was asked about what he thinks schools could do to help students to stay in school and not drop out, he replied:

"I think that they should make it fun, so it's not... Fun would be, I think that the teacher should talk about what the kids like. Because I was reading this book and it said that the most interesting thing to talk about is yourself or somebody else that you know. If you're talking to somebody talk about them, because it's the most interesting thing. So the teachers should talk about the kids so that they are involved in it."

7.2 Student 2

This is a fourteen year old boy who is a day student at one of the schools under study. He is in Grade 7 and repeated Grade 6. This student does not live on the campus where he attends school. He goes home every day when school ends. He lives at home with his biological mother and stepfather. He has three siblings and he is the second child of the four children in his family. He has previously lived in a group home for a short period of time. This respondent has changed his place of residence once in five years, but has changed four schools in the same amount of time. This student describes himself as a good person. He explains it this way, "I'm a good person. I'm smart, I'm happy, I have fun and I fool around."

He elaborated on what he meant by being “smart” by stating that he works hard in school and gets good marks in Math, English and French. However, he was unwilling to reveal the marks he scored in any of the courses he mentioned. Further discussion on school performance led to the revelation that he disliked Geography and science. When he was asked about his interest in school, he responded in the affirmative that he was interested in school. However, he did not like having to attend his present school. He would have much preferred to be in a regular public school.

When the student was asked to explain what success means to him, he responded this way:

“Being able to pass your grades; being able to jump on a bike; being able to pull off a catlock...to do tricks on your bike.”

Passing the courses in school are important for this student because he wants to be an architect, and by his admission, in his present school he is receiving the help he needs with math to enable him to achieve his future goal. But during our conversation he also indicated that at this time his major interests are in Extreme Sports. Real success for him now lies in his ability to jump very high and do tricks in the air on a BMX bike.

Here is his response to the question about receiving help from his present school to enable him to achieve the success that he desired. “Yes, it helps me just being able to go on being an architect.” On further investigation, the researcher learned that riding his bike was built into this student’s treatment program. He was therefore allowed to practice doing tricks on his BMX bike when it was warranted.

The student informed the researcher that he plans to return to a public school the following academic year. When he was asked about his views on what could be done in the public school to help him to achieve success, this was his reply:

“They could, well...I’m trying to be able to let them loan me a laptop because I cannot write and I cannot print. No one can read it, so I need a computer to do stuff like that. And that, they can bugger off and leave me alone.”

Although the student has the use full of a computer in his present school, he was not so privileged in the public school. His inability to write legibly and not having the use of a computer to help him caused him a certain amount of frustration while he attended public schools.

At this point, the ringing of the telephone in the office interrupted us. The interview with this student was temporarily suspended until the interruption ceased. But the student became restless and began to make unnecessary noises. These noises were recorded in the background. The interviewer asked him to stop and he obliged and stopped. The interviewing resumed for a few minutes, but again there was interruption from the passing traffic. This caused some difficulty in holding the respondent’s attention for much longer. The window was closed and the interview lasted for a short while before it was terminated.

However, before our conversation ended the respondent informed the interviewer that he was very popular. He had more than 20 friends. All his friends liked school and were attending regularly. When he got together with his friends he would, “bike, smoke cigarettes, go to the movies, go to the stores, hang around, work on the Internet.” When he was asked if he used the Internet to do research for his projects, he replied: “No, just for fun!”

TABLE 2

The rights of students with special needs
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The two students above expressed the frustration they experienced in public schools because they are unlike most students. They are incapable of keeping up with the academic demands in the public school if they do not receive the appropriate assistance they need. Both students have clearly demonstrated that a personal computer in classes that demand a lot of writing would be most beneficial to them. One could argue that supplying computers to every student with such a need could be very costly to the government, however in Canada education is a right for every youth up to the age of sixteen years old. Since education is not a privilege, and the call is to improve the high school dropout rate, Wolfensberger's (1972) theory of "normalization" for students with special needs ought to be given closer consideration in public schools.

Wolfensberger defined "normalization" as: "The use of culturally valued means to offer (disabled) persons life conditions at least as good as that of the average citizen's, and to as much as possible enhance or support their behaviour, appearances, experiences, status and reputation" (1980: 8). Perhaps, if these students are given the tools (in this case, the computers) they need to allow them to feel "normal" it could impact on them positively. In addressing one of the crucial needs of students – like the two above, it appears that if they had been listened to and computers were made available them, then it would have shown support for them. It is my view that such a supportive action might improve their behaviour, enhance their experiences and heighten their chance of school success. Levine (1972) has pointed out the astronomical cost to taxpayers and to the students who drop out of school. As such, the government can choose to pay now or pay far more later, should students continue to leave school prematurely.

7.3 Student 3

This student is a 15-year-old girl. She is in Grade 8 and repeated Grade 4. She is in placement because she frequently skipped school and has problems with her 3 siblings. She is the last of the four children in her family. When she leaves the residential centre, she goes to her home where she lives with her mother. One parent is an English Canadian and the other is French Canadian so both official languages are spoken in her home. She has previously lived in a shelter, a group

home and another residential centre. Her father is a security guard and her mother is a meat wrapper at a supper market. When the student was asked to describe herself, she replied that it was a hard question. She made an attempt to reply to the question and here is her response:

“It is hard because I want to say that I’m a rude person, but other people would say that like I’m a nice person and like a free person. I really don’t know, I think I’m a moderate person...People say I’m sweet and all. I’m telling them that I’m going to be a nurse. Like this guy that’s in my life right now, I’m telling him that I’m becoming a nurse and he said, ‘Good, you’ll really make a good nurse! You really (like) care and you’ll really help people and all!’”

In describing herself as a student, the respondent indicated that she was not good in school because she was failing math and French. This is her response, “Oh, I’m really not good in school. Math I’m failing. French I’m failing – mostly everything I’m failing!”

The student was asked to talk about the things that she liked about school and those that she did not like. Here is how she answered this question:

“What I dislike is my teacher. I dislike teachers. Some teachers are all right, but most of them I don’t like.”

When she was asked about reason for disliking teachers, she explained it like this:

“Because some of the teachers like for example: He had ten kids in the class. The rest of them are in French and he only had three kids left. One kid really was working on something and he had two kids left to deal with. He stayed with one specific kid and when I raised my hand for help, he didn’t bother helping me. He just ignored me like I was chopped liver...teachers are only sticking with one kid when they are supposed to be dealing with every single kid – you know. Like giving attention – the same measure, because no one is special. We all are special in a way, but no one is really, really special to get so much attention that no one else is getting. I think that we all should get the same amount of attention.”

Some teachers whom this student mentions as her “favourites” are those who treat her with respect.

“My favourite teachers are those, like sometimes I get attached to them because they are sweet and they give attention to every one the same. Sometimes, it depends on if they are pretty. Not all the time, it all depends on their personality and how they treat you. If I treat them with respect they should treat me back with respect. But if they don’t, then they are on my bad side.”

The student later indicated that in school she likes gym, but she would have to “get used to doing gym in front of boys. I feel yacky in front of them. I like doing computers and typing stuff.” Then the student informed the interviewer that she did not like school very much. However, she voiced the opinion that it was necessary for her to attend school if she were to achieve her goal of becoming a nurse. For that reason she would go to school and try hard. When she was asked about how much interest she had in school she replied:

“I don’t like it that much, but if I don’t go to school I’m not going to get an education. Like my brother, he is always at home. And he says, ‘you’re never going to get an education. You’re never going to become the nurse you want to become (if you don’t go to school).’ Then I’ll say, ‘I’ll go to school and try my best. That’s all that counts, it’s me trying my best!’”

The student indicates that she finds studying hard and school examinations provide some of the most horrifying experiences for her. In her words, here are some of her experiences:

“I think it’s weird – sometimes when I’m studying for like a big test, I get nervous and my stomach hurts. I end up going to the bathroom and being sick. Then it’s like my feet hurt and I’m shaking and I can’t read properly and something. So I say, ‘calm down!’ I put a rag on my head and lie on my bed and keep the book opened and then try to study. I just go inside. I’ll be agitated and tell them, ‘give me my test now!’ All I have is in my head, but once I have the test in front of my face my mind is blank. I don’t remember nothing. Then I say, ‘I know this question – come on, come on!’ I like come on, but I can’t get it. It’s really a shame. June 5 the exams are going to start again and I’m nervous already.”

When this student was asked about what success means to her, she replied that it meant nothing to her. She could not think of any thing at which she was

successful. She guessed that it may mean that, “Probably I can handle it, or you could do it. I don’t know what that word means so I can’t say anything.”

The student says that she has many friends from all ethnic groups. “I have Black friends, I have Chinese friends, I have everything...Every nationality is neat. Every single colour. I don’t care if it’s pink. I don’t care if it’s purple.” When this student is with her friends, she indicates that they spend their time hanging out at the arcade, going to the movies, attending sport activities, or just hanging around in one of the group member’s house while they watch movies, eat and smoke cigarettes.

Like herself, this student describes most of her friends as not liking school:

“Most of them – some days they have like really shitty days. And they’d say, ‘I’m not going to school, school sucks.’ Sometimes, I will say, ‘I’m not going to school. There is no point in school. I’m just going to go on welfare like everybody else.’ I got so frustrated with math I say that I’m going to go on welfare. I don’t care about being a nurse, but I really do!”

The student explained that an important characteristic her friends should have is respect. These are her words, “Well, respect is a huge thing. They have to show me respect to get respect back.” Some of this student’s friends are presently in placement. The following is her description of the reasons for their placement:

“Well, one of them was involved in a gang that I did not know about. He is in placement for attempted murder. The other one was having problems at home and they couldn’t deal with it. The other one wrote this stupid letter saying that, ‘I’m gonna shoot myself. Get me out of my fucking house now, or I’m gonna take a gun to their head and then jump off a bridge.’ Two of my friends attempted murder because of problems at home.”

The student was asked if she knew anyone who had dropped out of high school. To this question she replied that her father had dropped out, but when he was 39 years old he graduated from high school in Adult Education. Her 19-year-old brother has also dropped out of school. He stays at home and does not work. There is conflict

between she and her brother when she visits home. This is what she had to say about her brother and father:

“Well, my brother I know. He didn’t finish school and he’s not in school right now. He’s just sitting on his ass doing nothing – watching T.V like a couch potato. Every time I get home he says, ‘I’m tired, I have work to do.’ I’ve been in school all day. Give me a break! He starts bitching at me and yelling, ‘What the fuck are you doing? Why are you on the phone?’ I say, ‘Shut up! I had a long day in school. I’m the one studying. I’m the one trying to be a nurse. You’re just a couch potato. I don’t like this.’ Then he starts bitching, and then I have to call my mother hysterically. Then I just walk out and go and meet my mother or go see somebody that I could trust and who will help me. Sometimes I call here (school). Like yesterday I was going bunkers. My brother was getting on my nerves and my mother got involved. I started bitching at both of them and I said, ‘Fuck off all of you. I don’t need you guys in my life!’ Then I got out of there. I got out of there. Do you know that my brother worked in a grocery store, and then he quit? Then he worked at another place then he quit. He goes to these jobs, it doesn’t last a year...My father – he dropped out of school too. But he went back to school when he was 39 years old, and now he is a security guard.”

This student plans to graduate from high school and continue her education in college. Here are her words:

“After I graduate from high school I will be going to CEGEP – either Vanier or Dawson to go in a nursing program for three years. Then I’ll go to university.”

When the student was asked how much money she expected to earn as a nurse, she replied:

“I don’t know. I think they make quite a lot. They didn’t tell me practically. They just tell me that nurses make a lot of money. I don’t know how much money nurses make per year, but some make quite a few thousand dollars. Probably up to one thousand dollars per month or something.”

This student’s opinion is that public schools have failed her in the past because teachers have not always given her the attention necessary for her to succeed. She explains that when she was in Grade 4 her parents started to fight frequently and her marks began falling. At that time she needed more attention and help with her schoolwork, but she did not receive it so she failed Grade 4. This is her explanation:

“I think that the schools have failed me because when I was in Grade 4 my parents started fighting a lot and they were starting to break up. Then my grades started to go down and they got very low. Two years after they broke up. Then they told me that I have to repeat Grade 4, but the teachers only paid attention to their favourites. I did not feel special like some of the other kids.”

Despite her experiences, her view is that she can achieve the success she is seeking, if teachers give her the help and attention that she needs. However, she suggests that it is very difficult for the school to try and prevent students from dropping out because they have a legal right to do so at the age of 16. Here is the way she feels teachers could relax the classroom environment to accommodate students who are having difficulty coping with the rigidity of some classes:

“Teachers can say, ‘You’re gonna watch a movie once a week now. You guys can have a free dress day twice a week,’ and stuff like that. They could bring animals in and so on. That would definitely keep them in school.”

7.4 Student 4

This student is 14 years old. He is a Grade 7 boy who has seven siblings. He is the last of the eight children in his family. He has moved six times in the past five years and has changed three schools in five years. He repeated kindergarten twice. This respondent has been previously placed in a shelter, group home, residential centre and the Montreal Children’s Hospital because of physical and verbal aggression, running away from home, disobeying parents, problems with siblings and problems with step-parent. When this respondent is discharged from this residential centre, he is ambivalent about returning home to live with his parents. The student was asked to describe himself as a person and to this he replied:

“I’m a funny kid. I like to act like a clown. Like if someone’s angry, I try to make them happy by making them laugh, or doing something stupid... When I get angry – I don’t get angry often, but when I’m angry I storm out of the room cursing. I also think I have a good conscience control – not too badly at all.”

As a student, this is how the respondent describes himself:

“Hard working. Very dedicated to my work – smart. Bear in mind, I had to study - on my own to learn to read. I do a lot of things. I can do sports. That’s about it really!”

The student was asked to express his views about his school. Here are his views in his words:

“It’s not a regular school, it’s a group home school. We were not able to stay in a big school so they opened a school here for us. And so there are like two teachers. One teacher only teaches French and we have the same teacher in the other subjects of Math, English and Geography. A staff teaches gym. Sometimes it’s like a regular school.”

When the student was asked to describe what he liked and disliked about school, he responded this way:

“I dislike the pressure – the peer pressure. The peer pressure above everything. Whenever you make me angry I will get frustrated. Eventually I start crying, or I’ll go outside and smash my hand in the wall, or smoke a cigarette sometimes to calm me down.”

Peer pressure for this student is: “Everybody in my class, if I’m doing something, they start teasing me. Or one student will say, ‘Give me the answer!’ I say, ‘No!’ And he’d say, ‘If you don’t give me the answer I won’t be your friend’”

The student was questioned about the interest he had in school now and this is his response:

“First, I attend school and that is right. I like the computer class. Computer is my favourite. My parents always told me that school is fun, and it is. I enjoy it, just don’t tell my friends that! I don’t want them to think I’m a dwork as much as I really love school. It’s just that these days, reputation is everything. I just want people to know me as fun person and not as a geeky person.”

The student was asked to explain the meaning of success. Here is his explanation:

“Success is doing well, accomplishing your goal, willing to meet what you are. Like you would set a goal and you work to meet it. And when you do meet it, you are successful – you’re happy. You’ve done a good job. When you go through kindergarten you do a good job right through to retirement - to a successful life. You have a good job. You have successful job. You’re a successful worker. You have a successful education, you’re popular, you have a successful life, so everybody has some successful things about them. I have a couple ones. Mine is to make people laugh and doing well in school. When they give me test that I really study for and I can really do it quickly and still get a lot of the answers right – that’s one success.”

This student believes that he is getting the necessary help in this school to enable him to succeed in his schoolwork. Here is how he describes the help he receives at this school:

“I find it easier here than in a public school cause I’m dyslexic and I have HDD. It’s hard for me having hyperactive deficit disorder, and here, as you probably know, they help me to cope. Here, I get phenomenal education. They help me by teaching me. They are helping me learn and they sort of give me tips. Like I would have problems memorizing my 9 times table so my teacher made up a sentence for me. This helped me to remember my tables.”

This student states that the schools that he previously attended have failed him because the teachers were unable or unwilling to give him the kind of help he needed.

The following are his words:

“Schools have failed me! Some of the teachers – they don’t teach you, they tell you. I remember this one school and I couldn’t understand, and the teacher would be telling me. And she eventually got angry and threw her desk at me. She threw the desk and shoved it over and I got shocked and fell off my chair. I took it, but my mom took me out of that school because the teachers were not proper towards kids. They would get angry, they would yell, they would insult us. I dislike them!”

“In another school, the teachers would yell at us. Sometimes they would send us to the principal’s office. They would phone down to the principal’s office ahead of us. And then when we walked in the principal would yell at us, grab us and push us down in a chair, and then give us this long lecture. Then she’d say, “I can hurt you because I’ve been in the Olympics. And then she puts on a pair of boxing gloves, shoes and a bunch of equipment and she scared us.”

Despite the student's unfortunate school experiences with teachers, he was able to name two teachers whom he called his favourites. To him, these teachers knew not only how to teach, but also how to listen to students. This is what he had to say:

"My old teacher Maxine – she would be the first teacher who ever helped me. She was fun. She was devoted to us and she knew how to listen to us. She knew we were bright kids. And then there was Sandra. She was a good teacher as well. She was funny. She was pertinent. They were the best two teachers I ever had. They are my favourites."

The student was asked about his views on how school could help him to succeed and he responded this way:

"They can help you by listening instead of threatening. Let's say you're the type of person who doesn't understand something – it's hard to write down stuff. It's like well, they should make it fun. Like here, I learn to memorize north, south, east and west because my teacher taught me this sentence – Never Eat Shredded Wheat. It goes in order."

The student was asked to describe the person outside of school who has been kindest to him. Here is his reply:

"The only person who has been kind to me was really nobody. I grew up and was hated because of my parents. My parents told me at a very early age that they did not like me. I really had no friends. I grew up – until I got in placement – then people liked me."

The student indicated that all his friends are in placement. Each time he has a different placement, he makes additional friends from all ethnic groups. In his words, "Some are White, some are Black, some are Chinese, some are Asian and some are Jewish." He will make friends with anyone, "As long as they are not rude, mean, selfish or greedy." However, he has kept only two close friends – a boy and a girl. Here is how he describes his relationship with each one:

"The first day I went to this group home, this girl came up to me and started talking. She initiated the conversation. Then eventually after we started talking,

she showed me around. Then she and I became very good friends. We just really, really clicked with each other. While the boy, he was a rebel. Like he used to terrorize the group home. We'd hang around, go out and we'd joke around. One time I even took his Medicare card and used it. We are really, really good friends."

For the future, the student plans to graduate from high school and continue his education in college and then university. Computer is his favourite course in school, therefore he may study "something to do with computers." When the student was asked how much money he would like to earn for his salary, this is how he responded:

"Well, I'm probably growing up, so I'm not sure yet. A couple grand about at least every two months or so. More than \$2 000 bucks - \$5 476 per month. Actually, much more!"

The student was asked to remark on what he thinks schools could do to help more students succeed. This is his view:

"I don't know if schools can do anything more if they teach you the proper way. It depends on the student if he is willing to get good grades, or if he is willing to slack off. It all depends more on the student than on the school."

This student does not know any one who has dropped out of school, but he does have some views on how schools could prevent students from dropping out. Here are his remarks:

"Make it interesting. Don't yell, don't scream, and especially don't hit. The worst thing you can do is to make a kid hate school."

TABLE 3

<p>Success through accommodation</p>

<p>A recurring theme in most of the stories in this chapter is the plan to achieve school success through accommodation. The last two stories above have demonstrated that these students have had unwanted experiences in the public schools, which they previously attended. They have expressed strong disregard for</p>

the schools and teachers whom they feel have wronged them and have contributed to their failure in school. Yet they have expressed the notion that completing the high school program is paramount to their success, so with one accord they have suggested that they are willing to accommodate the “discomforts” of school to achieve this success. Gibson’s (1988) theory of school success through accommodation supports the view that some students are willing to suppress their feelings and beliefs that are contradictory to that of the school’s in order to achieve success. Ogbu (1987) and Fordham (1991) point out that some minority students, who adopt the required behaviours of public schools, run the risk of being ostracized by their peers. But the students in this study do not have to contend with such repercussions. Although they are racially diverse the common threads that bind them are their personal experiences and present location and not their race.

7.5 Student 5

This young man is seventeen years old. He is in Grade 10. His mother is English Canadian and his father is from Lyon in France. He says that he prefers to return home for visits only, while he is in placement, but does not plan to live there permanently after his discharge. He has moved four times in the past five years and has changed three schools in the same amount of time. Previously he has lived in a group home, a shelter, a residential shelter and a foster home. He has had these placements because he disobeyed his parents, but said that he was verbally and physically abused. This student did not wish to divulge any information about his position of birth among his siblings, or if he were an only child. However, during the interview he mentioned that he had brothers and sisters. As a person, this student describes himself the following way:

“I would describe myself as a person that likes to do a lot with himself – and how should I put it? Has an ambition to do certain things. I’m able to be encouraged by what people have to say to me. I have certain goals that I want to accomplish and I know that have the power to accomplish these goals.”

This is the how the student describes himself as a student:

“As a student, I would say that sometimes I have a hard time getting along with the other kids in class. Not in the present school that I am in now, but in schools that I was in before I came here. I had a very hard time in school both academically and socially. The other kids would tease me about either the way I spoke, or the way I acted or the way I looked. And they would pick on me and they would find the smallest and stupidest reason to bug me. But I have a hard time with my peers because I sometimes have a hard time talking to them, you know. I have a hard time like acting my age. Academically, I would say that I have a lot of problems because I have a concentration problem which might be ADD. I don’t know, but I’m easily distracted. I have a hard time with exams. Most of my exams are not that great because I have a hard time doing the work in whatever subject or whatever subject that exam is based on. Either because I haven’t done the work, or I haven’t tried hard enough, or I don’t remember because I have a low concentration span. I don’t know anything else that I could say.”

The student was asked what he likes and dislikes about school and the following is his reply:

“What do I like about school? I like to work even though I can’t do the work, and I like school because certain schools that I’ve gone to are very structured and I like structure. I like being in school because it gives me a chance to meet and to be with people that I don’t know. I like making friends and talking with people. One of the things I dislike about school is that sometimes some kids transform it from a place to learn into a place for social gathering. These kids don’t focus on their work, but on the other kids – how they dress, or how they themselves are dressed. I feel that some schools – the environment is such that kids are not focused on what they should be doing in school. The point is – schools should be for learning.”

The following is the student’s response to the question, how much interest do you have in school now?

“I have a lot of interest because I know that the only way that I’m going to accomplish those things that I really want – which is to finish off high school and go to CEGEP and go to university and get a degree which will enable me to do something that I want to do – which is to go into communications. So to go into communications, I still have to study things in high school. Sometimes I like it and sometimes I don’t.”

The student was asked to explain what success means to him and here is his explanation:

“Success! I feel that the word success means that when you have done something that you like or you didn’t like, but you knew you had to do it anyway to accomplish your goal. And once you’ve accomplished it, you feel successful because you feel that you have learned what you’ve done, and you feel better afterwards. That’s how I probably see success. One example of my success was – first of all, I like taking pictures and I like writing poetry and short stories, and any type of creative writing. One of things that I’ve been successful at is to write a short story and it was put in the newspaper that we publish once a month. But I’m also good at talking and singing. I’m good at playing the guitar and I also play the percussion. I like to DJ for parties. The entertainment part – mixed with the fact that I can talk well helps me to do well with the D. Jaying. I want to get into radio later on.”

The student remarked that while he was a student at Vezina (an alternative high school), he was given the opportunity to experience success as he participated in an activity that he really liked. This is his story about this event.

“I think that one time I was able to be successful at what I really wanted to do...which is singing. At Vezina last year there was a guy that came in with a microphone and headphones and this computer size piece of equipment. You know, like it would just like through a court. So the guy came and took several students in the school that wanted to either say a piece of poetry, or sing, or play the guitar with different instruments but with no vocals. The product in the end was to make a tape. I was successful at being able to sing something that I really liked and it worked out well. So if you’re asking me if certain schools do help students to work towards their goal and accomplish what they want to do? I say, ‘Yeah, certain schools do!’ But this was only once. It’s not something that they do all the time. I don’t think that there is enough high school out there – whether it be alternative high school, or regular high school that do anything about programs like this. I think that high schools should have their own little radio stations for the people who have the talent and interest in communications.”

When asked about his favourite courses and favourite teachers, he explained that the two courses he likes most are Drama and English. When he was able to do Drama in an alternative school (not his present school) his final grade was 80%. He indicated that he favoured three teachers who taught him while he attended an alternative school. His reasons for favouring these teachers are:

“This teacher, I liked because he was funny. He reminded me of Cramer in Seinfeld. He was funny – he was always joking. When he was teaching Math, he

would always tell us jokes and he would make us laugh. You would think that he was on speed or something. The other teacher, I liked him because he was able to take something...that I knew nothing about and probably the rest of the class didn't know anything about it either, and explain it in such a way that we would understand what he was saying. He would take some thing boring and make it interesting. The 3rd teacher, I liked him, but I have no particular reason. He was just – of the three teachers, he was just the easygoing type of person.”

During the conversation regarding role models, the student informed the researcher that he has chosen Michael Jackson to be his role model. Here is his explanation:

“Well first of all, I’ve always liked Michael Jackson. And I’ve always thought that me and him have quite a lot of things in common, and that we both have the same kind of feelings and emotions because we both have the same kind of background. I don’t know how to get into that. Okay, I’ll give you an example. One way I find that Michael Jackson and I are alike is the type of background we’ve had. He came from a poor family with lots of brothers and sisters. I have brothers and sisters. But he had a father who was abusive towards him both verbally and physically. And my father for one - when I was smaller, verbally and physically abused me. That’s one of the reasons at one time I had gone to a group home, because I’d had enough at home and I just couldn’t take it anymore. By the kind of things that we feel, I think that Michael Jackson is a person that is very sad and he’s angry at the world. He’s the type of person who likes to be alone, except for when he’s on the stage in front of millions of people. He likes to be alone and doesn’t like to be disturbed. He likes his own space. I like Michael Jackson, I dance like him and when we’re not dancing we’re very elegant. We’re very articulate and we even have the same birthday sign. He’s a Virgo and I’m a Virgo. There’s quite a couple of things that we have in common. I feel that I can achieve some of the things that Michael has achieved because I’m into singing or what not, but I want to go more into the communications field. Singing is just something that I do well.”

The student was questioned about his friends. In his reply he indicated that he only had a few friends and one best friend. His best friend’s father is from the Philippines and his mother is English Canadian. The respondent said that when he and his friend are together they, “Talk, play video games, listen to music, bike, roller blade, and skate board.” He also said that his friend who goes to Westmount High School is a very good student. “He is very serious about his studies.”

Although this respondent knows some students who are in placement, he does not have friends in placement. Here is his response:

“Well, I know people in placement. People that I know, not people that I would call my friends.”

Throughout the interview this student was quite explicit about his desire to have a job in radio in the future. However, when he was asked about the salary he was expecting to receive in that job he replied:

“I don’t know, about \$500 a week. And that’s after taxes. That’s about a \$1 000 a week – and a clear \$500.”

7.6 Student 6

This student is seventeen years old. He is in Grade 10. He has two siblings and he is the first child in his family. He has changed four schools in five years, but his parents have not changed their place of residence in five years. Before being placed in this residential centre, he was removed from his home and placed in a group home for skipping school regularly, disobeying his parents and verbal and physical aggression. The respondent’s biological father is a lawyer while his stepfather is a doctor. His mother is an interior decorator. He has left a private school to attend a social affairs school. This student describes himself as a nice, generous and sociable person. As a student he says:

“I’m a pretty good student. I work hard in class. I study hard and do all my work, but I would like to have a bit more discipline. Like sometimes I don’t feel like doing my homework or something like that – I always get it done though. If I could change anything as a student, that is exactly what I would want – to get my work done when I have to.”

The student was asked to explain what he liked and disliked about school and here is his response:

“School’s pretty good. I like it. I don’t have problems with it. I like school and I like my teachers. Like I only have one teacher at this school and she is a good teacher. I’m not taking a lot of subjects here. I’m only taking the main courses for Grade 10 – Math, English and French. I like all my subjects, I did pretty well in them. The only thing I dislike about this school – it’s bad for our school – and that is I’m not in a regular school with all my friends and everything. So I miss that quite a bit. Another problem is, they are not able to teach the sciences here because you wouldn’t be able to do any of the lab experiments. I liked my other schools a lot – got along pretty well. But I wasn’t doing that well in my other schools, but that’s because of me. Because I didn’t really care that much and my attitude changed since I’ve been in placement. I just realized how important school was. Before, I just figured that if I didn’t pass it didn’t matter because I would end up in summer school. And then I would go up to Grade 11. When I got to Grade 11, I would go to college and everything would be fine. But now I have a lot of interest in school. My favourite subject is English.”

The student was asked to describe his view of success and he said:

“Success is achieving the goal that you set for yourself. For me, I guess it would be getting through high school and university, raising a family, getting a good job and making money.”

A good job for this student means being a professional. “A professional - I want to be a lawyer,” said he.

The student states that the following are his main goals:

“My main goal is to get out of placement. And that’s been working very well. I’m going to be going home very soon. I also want to get into a regular school system next year because I don’t want to associate myself with group homes and Youth Protection. I want to live at home. I want to live a normal life with my friends. Even though I’m doing well here, I would much prefer to be in a regular public school.”

The student was asked for his views on some of the most important opportunities that schools offer him to succeed. This was his response:

“Education, knowledge, and well this knowledge you gain, it sets you up with skills for later on in life or when you graduate. I would say, obviously they teach you. We learn Math skills and different languages. Then there’s some social course like MRE. Other courses like Business. Let’s say later on in life when you get a job, or whatever you do later on in life you will have a basic knowledge of those courses.”

The student was asked if he thought that the schools he attended before this one had failed him and replied:

“No, it was me! It was my decision not to work hard. When I was probably in Grade 6 or 7, I just decided to have fun and go with my friends.”

To the question, what can schools do to help you succeed? The student replied:

“It’s we the student – the student will have to put in time to succeed. I don’t think it’s the school, it’s the students. They will have to follow the school program rather than the school following them.”

But if a student does not like a program, or cannot cope with the work, the respondent then explained that it’s the school’s responsibility to address that problem. Here are his words:

“If a student does not like a program and can’t cope with it, well it’s obviously not the right environment for him or her. Then it will be the schools obligation to help that student find a different environment.”

The student stated that he likes basketball and that he is very good at it. As such, he has chosen Kobe Bryant to be his role model. Kobe is a member of the LA Lakers basketball team. He tries to copy Kobe’s basketball moves, but he does not think that he could achieve many of things that this basketball player has achieved because as the student says, “he’s pretty good!”

The student suggested that he had many friends. Here is how he describes them:

“Most of my friends are between 16 and 18 years old. They are from all different races and religion – Jewish, Moslems and Chinese. They all go to different schools – private and public. Not all my friends live where I live. They live in Westmount, TMR and NDG. Most of them don’t like school and are having difficulty in school. Some of my friends are in placement now for all different reasons. I have one friend, his parents passed away so he is living with his mother’s sister. She has trouble supporting him right now so he is in placement. My other friend is in placement because he wasn’t doing well in school and social

worker got involved. Some of my friends just haven't been getting along with their parents and do not have a good relationship – some are court ordered.”

He explains the qualities he looks for in a friend this way:

“My friends should be trusting, caring, fair and very smart. Those are the people I like to associate with because I like to be able to talk to my friends and have a conversation with them. If they are not smart I don't like them because I can't have conversations with them.”

The following is the student's description of the activities in which he and his friends engage when they are together:

“Sometimes we relax, watch videos, or go shopping – stuff like that. We go to the clubs sometimes – whenever we feel like it.”

Although some of this student's friends do not like school and are experiencing difficulty in school, he states that none of them has dropped out. But he does have some acquaintances who were attending public schools and dropped out when they were in Grade 11.

It was previously mentioned that this student's future plan is to return home to live with his mother and stepfather after he is discharged from this institution. His career goal was also mentioned as being a lawyer. When the student was asked about the salary he would be expecting to receive as a lawyer he said, “A big one!” On further investigation about his meaning of the word “big” in this context - he replied, “Big as in a couple of thousand per week – meaning \$2 000.00 per week.

The respondent was asked to give his views on what schools could do to help students achieve the goals that they set for themselves, and this was his response:

“I think it's more the student than the school, but I think the school could help you to work on these qualities. They could ask you to decide what your goals are and they would have to decide what they would do to help you.”

When the respondent was asked his views on what schools could do to prevent students from dropping out, he replied this way:

“They could have a program where people could come and speak to the students who are about to drop out – about dropping out and what happens after – do a presentation. Also I think for the teachers, they can try and make it more fun for kids to learn because they would have an easier time. That’s it!”

7.7 Student 7

This student is eighteen years old. He repeated Grade 9 and now is in Grade 10. He is the only child of a Canadian mother and Italian father. His father is a building construction worker with a Grade 6 education and his mother is a housewife with high school diploma. When the student leaves the centre for weekends, he goes home to his biological parents. He lived in a group home before his arrival at this centre. He is presently placed for skipping school regularly. This student was asked to describe himself as a person. The following is his description:

“I’m a very interesting person. I think I can say I know who I am, but I still allow other people to tell me who I am. I would like to understand their point of view. I think I project an image and I would like to know what they think of the image that I project. I am intelligent, I am handsome and I can have a good conversation. Maybe at times I’m antisocial. I’m an introverted person at times. I have goals like most people.”

Here is how he describes himself as a student:

“Well, I guess in the past I wasn’t a very good student. I skipped school, I wouldn’t do my homework and I would be abusive towards teachers – like I know some students are. I would just not attend school for long periods of time - for months. I would come in exams – I would play around, so I ended up failing a year – Grade 9.”

The student was asked to talk about school – what were his likes and dislikes in the schools he had attended. These are his remarks:

“Well, at the moment I’m attending this school. This school is a very different school. It’s an alternative school within a group home. The majority of students don’t go to these types of school. In this school I like the fact that there is one teacher that is teaching all the subjects. And that she spends quite a bit of time with each focusing on their needs and the way they learn, and understanding their problems – whether they can’t concentrate or they are having problems with a subject. The teacher here is very nice. She is understanding and pushes you to succeed if you want to succeed. I didn’t like the public schools very much, so I’m not the right person to ask.”

At this point the student was reluctant to make any further remark about public schools, but he did say: “I didn’t like their marking system because it was far too competitive. We always had to be competing against each other for the highest mark.”

The student was asked about his interest in school now. Here is his reply:

“I guess I would lie if I said that I didn’t care. I guess the only reason when I was in high school with a lot of students was the competition. But now that I’m here, I just want to do well. I’m not interested in getting really high marks. Maybe I should, but that’s the type of person I am. But I guess I wouldn’t be satisfied if my marks were really low. I have interest of going on to college, so my interest now is going on to graduate from high school and get my diploma. So whatever it takes, I’m going to do that to graduate.”

The student remarked that he did not favour exams and that history is his favourite subject:

“I get very anxious in exams – when I’m about to write. I guess I study and prepare and I get through it. But most times I have a difficult time. I get sick to the stomach and get all knotted up, but I get through it.”

The student was asked to describe the qualities he likes in a teacher and he said:

“I’ll explain that by saying what I don’t like. I don’t like a teacher that’s grumpy, that has a temper, that comes to class always in a bad mood, is rude at times and is inconsiderate – and is very strict, very, very strict. I like flexibility. Well, I guess the teachers I like would be those who noticed me some periods and who saw some potential in me; and encouraged me and inspired me at times by

telling me their side of things and maybe their life story. They are not very rigid – and they are not just like a wall.”

What do you understand by the word success? To this question the student replied:

“Success is a personal fulfillment that a person has. Most people would think it’s money, but I’m not that type of person – even though I like money. I sure love money. I would like to obtain as much money as possible, but that’s not the real reason a person does something. More than that – whatever makes you happy. You have a goal and if you achieve your goal that’s success.”

This respondent states that he puts himself down a lot and therefore he was unable to think of anything that he was good at, or any form of success that he had achieved. But he does hope to be successful when he graduates from high school because, “I’m not doing all this for nothing I hope,” said he.

When asked about help that he had received from schools as he worked towards achieving his goal, he mentions his present school. This is what he had to say:

“I guess I didn’t know it at the time. I know my high school years weren’t good years. But now that I’m here, I just feel good that I’m going forward. And I know that I have to pay attention to my schoolwork if I want to get a good paying job, or if I want to go into a career.”

Adolescents, facing many problems in life refuse to be judged only by grades. This student expresses the view that the public schools he attended failed him at a time when he was experiencing difficulties at home. Here are the reasons he gave:

“I think that the schools I went to before I came here failed me because, I guess I was going through hard times. I was having problems at home and that affected my studies. As a child I really wanted to – as you say succeed in school, get good marks and impress my mother. Sometimes my mother would really force me to complete my homework and she would help me and do my homework sometimes to make sure I did it. So she was obsessive, I think which really got me

clear on in life. And I got decent grades. It's just from Grade 8 to Grade 9, I just didn't care anymore – like marks. I was bored in class a lot. I guess I would have liked for somebody – a teacher or a counselor, or anybody to come searching, noticing that I was slackening off and that I was not attending. I just wished that they could have done something for it dragged on for a year and then another 6 months. And that's a long time you know! I was unable to help myself at the time. I don't think the school was attentive enough."

The student was asked to give his opinion on what schools could do to help students with similar experience as his and he replied:

"Well, I don't ask the teachers to know the life story of every student, but I would ask of them to notice when they are not interested and not taking it for granted. It's just maybe asking a few questions after class if things are O.K, or if they need help or something. Sometimes students won't go to the teacher or ask for help."

This student has chosen some popular actors to be his role models. Here is how he tells his story:

"Well, I like films. I like film making, so I'm often enchanted with movie stars and actors like Robert De Niro, Marlon Brando and Jack Nicholson. I know that Marlon Brando wouldn't be a good role model because he is kind of an outcast, but I like the guy. I guess all actors who are good want to learn as much as possible about their craft. I guess it's the same as me. In school I want to learn as much as possible about what I need to know."

The student explained that he copies his role models' gestures, mannerisms and walk and he believes that he can achieve the things that they have achieved.

Here is how he expressed his view:

"I copy the characteristics that they portray – like gestures, mannerisms and the way they walk. I also believe that anything is possible in life. I don't think that anything is impossible, and if one person do it then the second person could do the exact same thing. So I think that I can achieve the same thing as those actors."

When the student was asked about his friends he indicated that he only has one friend. This person has been his friend from his kindergarten days. His friend

is Canadian and he said that he does not socialize with students from different ethnic groups. This is how he describes his friend:

“He is a funny guy. He is always funny and I hope he never changes. He makes me laugh, and he’s also a storyteller. He has a comic side of things you nuh! And he has the same dreams as I have – maybe not the same, but he has the idea of Hollywood and so do I. He hasn’t been a great student, but he’s never failed. He’s always passed. He is 18 years old and is in college now and he wants to become a scriptwriter. So I think that I have influenced him and he has encouraged me you nuh! He has curly hair. He is taller than me and he doesn’t wear glasses.”

Throughout this interview the student was abundantly clear about his aspirations for the future. When he was asked about the salary he was expecting to earn in the future, he said:

“I want to get involve in film making – directing is my main goal. I know that one million dollars look like a huge salary. I think it wouldn’t seem real. It would appear shocking. But I mean – that’s it! I want to make movies and those are the type of salaries we get!”

The student was asked to give his opinion on how school could help him to achieve his goal. This is what he had to say:

“I kinda see school as a tool that a person uses. I don’t like being in that system – although that’s the way it is. But if it were up to my choice I’d rather the way they used to learn in the 19th century – in the library. You’d spend your whole day in the library. All you’d need is a computer – I guess a pencil and paper too. That’s just the kind of person I am. I guess high school is different from college where you can be more independent and make more choices. I don’t really like the high school system. They don’t give you enough space – even in the English Department, which I think they should. They didn’t have drama courses - which I think I would have liked. But I want to be successful in making movies so if school will take me there, then I’m willing to put up with it.”

The student was asked to give his views on what schools could do to prevent students from dropping out, and this was his reply:

“I think most of the students who leave are those who are delinquent – who are abusive verbally towards teachers, and I think that they should resolve to punishing them. I don’t think it’s the answer by giving detentions, or by suspensions because that’s just saying, ‘Go home!’ And that’s what they want.

They want to be home, so that's just giving them what they want. Detentions just give them a chance to fool around, and it makes them even more rebellious. I think teachers should make the class more interesting and not do it by the book. Also making it more interactive with the teacher and not just, 'here, do this and do that and you have this amount of time to finish!'"

7.8 Student 8

This student is a sixteen year old girl. She failed Grade 8 and is presently working on a combined Grade 8/9 program. In her family, she is the first of two girls. She did not wish to divulge any information about her parents, but she did mention that at home she lives with her mother. She also revealed that English and French were the languages spoken in her home. In the last five years she changed her home twice and has changed schools five times in the same amount of time. She has previously been placed in a group home for skipping school, disobeying her mother and having problems with her sister. After leaving the residential centre in which she is now placed, her goal is to return home and live with her mother. The following is this student's description of herself as a person:

"As a person I'm stupid. I'm not very good at work – you know that? I'm not good in school and I rarely have any friends. I like to help people some times – if they are good persons. But sometimes if they want to just make fun of me, or be mean to me or something bad – I won't bother to help them do anything."

The student was asked to describe herself as a student, and the following is her reply:

"I'm a very below average student. No, I'm not really below average – I guess I'm not smart at all in school. The Math is horrible. I know I'm going to fail! I've failed it once and then I'm going to fail it again, and I'm never getting any help. I just wish I was better in Math and all that! It's my worst subject."

When the student was asked to describe what she liked and disliked about school, she said:

“This one here is really boring, but you only get four periods. That’s actually good sometimes – like French, English, Math and Geography. That’s O.K! I find it better than the other schools, but I find it boring. The other schools, you have more periods – but like you have more freedom. But this school here, you can’t have any freedom at all, because you can’t go off - like after school because you are in a group home – and that’s their view. In the other schools, I don’t like when I’m working and all that and the teachers yell at you and all that.”

The student was asked to explain what success means to her and here is her explanation:

“Success means you have knowledge and you’ve just made it, and you’re happy. You know you have everything you want in life. I have never been successful at anything – I’m 16 years old and I’m in Grade 8/9. I’m supposed to be in Grade 10 or 11.”

The student was asked to talk about some of the activities that she liked.

This was her response:

“I like to fight, but I just like to fight for my right. I like to argue, but I’m not interested in being a lawyer because people laugh and make fun of me.”

The student suggested that although she did not receive the help she needed from the schools she had attended, she was the one responsible for her failure.

Here is the way she expresses herself:

“I don’t think that it was the school that failed me. I think that I didn’t do the test right because I was on medication and couldn’t remember anything. I could have studied harder to succeed in school.”

The student was asked to explain how she deals with school failure, and she replied:

“I suffer a lot. I come home and cry and cry. And I just feel why can’t I do the Math? Or why can’t I do this work? It’s not fair – all the other kids they get high grades. They get like 90 percent on the test and I don’t get that. Why do I get like 40 percent or something like that? Why me? Why God chose me or something?”

It appears that sometimes exams do more damage to students than good. The student remarked that she did not like exams because she usually fails them. She said:

“Well, you know at school – like outside schools, I couldn’t do any exams. I am so nervous I get sick to my stomach. I couldn’t do it. I said to myself – this voice in my head said, ‘You can’t do it, you’re stupid. You’re just gonna fail it anyway so what’s the point.’”

The student stated that she likes History, but French is her favourite subject. Even though she is failing she still has a favourite subject. The student was asked to describe the qualities that she would like teachers to have. These are her views:

“A teacher is responsible, likes to teach and loves to be a teacher – to help the students and be fair – has respect and not let the students fail. Never, never give up on children, but just be there for them.”

On the matter of friends, the student remarked earlier that she has no friends. Here she talks about the friends she had before. She said:

“I don’t have any friends anymore. I had some last year, but I lost them all because they moved away or something. Last year I was a totally different kind of person. Some of my friends did drugs, but not cocaine – just pot or hash. Some of them drank beer – alcohol. My friends did not like school. They were not doing good in school. Some of them plan to drop out of school. I had a few White friends; I had a few Black friends and I had many kinds of friends. But I had some friends – they were really nice – but they weren’t my real my friends.”

When the student talked about her future, she mentioned that she would like to graduate from high school, “But it’s too hard for me so I might drop out.” She was asked to explain what she would do if she dropped out of school. The following is her explanation:

“If I drop out of high school I’d probably stay home, but my mom would probably kick me out of the house. She doesn’t want any drugs coming into the house. That’s why she put me here. But if she said that she wouldn’t kick me out, I’d probably stay and go for walks because I don’t know what kind of job I could

get. What kind of job can you get if you drop out of high school – when you're under 18 especially? McDonald's job – what that's supposed to do for you?"

The student was asked to talk about how much money she wanted to earn and she said:

"I would like to have a \$1 000 per week. I'd like to be rich."

Throughout this interview, the student has mentioned that she does not believe that she will be successful in school. She was asked her opinion on what schools should do to help her to succeed, and this was her reply:

"They can bring more life and make you feel like children. They should help them study more, and shouldn't let them fail. I mean, if a child fails – the teacher is obviously going to blame the child. So they'll say, 'You weren't working hard enough; you weren't studying hard enough!' Sometimes that might not be true – it might not be the child's fault. It could be because the child was abused when he was younger, or something. Or it could be sexually abuse or rape, or kidney problem with a child or something – or anorexic or anything, and the child can't study hard in school for they are too weak or something, so they could offer more time after school."

To the question, what can schools do to prevent students from dropping out?

She answered:

"Well, what schools can do to prevent students dropping out of school is encourage them saying, 'You are not worthless, you are a human being. You have every right to be free, or you have every right to become this or do whatever you want to do when you grow up or something. We love you, learn to love yourself for who you are. No matter what you think about yourself, we're here to help you and that's the most important thing we want to do for you.' So they should encourage children to achieve and stop putting so much pressure on them."

TABLE 4

Effects of formal evaluation
The students in this study speak about the difficulty they experience in writing formal exams. Some have even remarked that they fear exams to the point

of being sick when they have to write them. They also indicate that the competitiveness of such an evaluation system impacts negatively on them. But the functionalists argue that competition is necessary for the purpose of sorting and selecting future leaders (Entwistle, 1981). To remedy the fears and ills that some students experience during exams Noddings (1992) suggested an alternative approach to education - including evaluation. By using the image of a very large family to convey the "caring" way in which one could think about the task of schooling a diverse group of students, Noddings hopes to eliminate the competitiveness - among other ills in schools. But Bennett and LeCompte (1995) remind us that schools are sites where students learn the difference between parents and other adults. They learn that teachers do not respond to them as their parents do, and that teachers are not present to nurture their individual idiosyncracies or needs. Schools and family differ on the relative emphasis they place on different modes of evaluation (Dreeben, 1968). Whereas families evaluate their children on the basis of their individual personality, schools evaluate students primarily on the basis of the results of their tests and how well they do in school (Bennett and LeCompte, 1995). Parents usually reward their offspring immediately for successful completion of tasks, while schools operate on the premise of deferred gratification. In this case, teachers take the functionalist position and encourage students to believe that if they work hard in school they will benefit from tangible rewards in the future. Gratification in doing schoolwork is attached to receiving good grades (Illich, 1971). Grades symbolically represent future material rewards therefore students with good grades can expect to be well rewarded in the world, while students with poor grades can expect the reverse to take place in their lives (Bowles and Gintis, 1976).

The students in this study accept the promise of deferred gratification, but working towards a successful school career is difficult for them. Even more difficult is working towards a successful future that seems so far away from their present location. Most students in this study have developed a dislike for formal testing and fear exams because of past experiences of failure. Persistent failure in school leaves them feeling dumb or stupid (Erickson, 1993). The Student Development Centre at the University of Western Ontario (2002) suggests that students' fear of tests might stem from poor time management, failure to organize text information and poor study habits. Fear and anxiety might also stem from worrying. For example, worrying about past failures, how other students are doing, their own past performance on exams and the negative consequences of failure. The experiences of these students are embodied in all the above causes of exam anxiety and fear. Therefore, it stands to reason that these students who are seized by the grip of fear of exams have a high probability to fail if they are not helped.

The view of formal testing being used as a means to keep students in tracks as illustrated by Jeannie Oakes (1985) could be applied to this scenario. Their stories have indicated that their performance in schoolwork and exams have been usually poor. Consequently, in classes in the public schools they attended, these students were usually placed in lower tracks, special education classes, or with students of whom teachers had low expectations. Oakes argues that tracking alienates students and undermines their social aspirations and feelings of self-

worth, and in the cases of some of these students – they give up on school and drop out.

Recently, the notion of formal testing where all students sit in a large room and write an examination for more than two hours in most cases has come into question (Phillips, 1992). New and more exciting ways of teaching, learning and testing are being suggested that should alleviate the stress of being tested on what is learned. Noddings (1992), Gardner (1983), Postman (1995) and Dewey (1902) would eradicate such stress and fears by restructuring the traditional liberal curriculum that emphasizes formal testing of verbal and mathematical intelligence as a method to sort and select students for various positions in life. In so doing, Noddings (1992) suggests cultivating a school environment of care and not one of competition; while Gardner (1983) takes the position that different people have different strengths and that these varied strengths or intelligence should be recognized and nurtured. In the venture of encouraging school success by de-emphasizing competition of verbal and mathematical skills through formal testing, the theme of learning through participation is again emphasized (Noddings, 1992; Dewey, 1938; Gardner, 1983). Added to the thinkers mentioned above with regards to learning through construction of knowledge, Postman (1995) suggest that knowledge should be presented to students through a mode of participation and not as a commodity to be acquired. As postman puts it, “It is hardly utopian to invent forms of youthful participation in social reconstruction as an alternative or supplement to the schooling process” (1995: 102). The suggestions by the above thinkers would de-emphasize failure and encourage success.

Of course grading schoolwork that is outside the traditional curriculum is far more difficult and challenging for teachers (Postman, 1995), but the results for students who experience difficulties can be astounding – emotionally and academically. Postman writes: “As you can imagine, it was also exceedingly difficult to grade students on their activities, and after a while all tests ceased. This made many people unhappy, for many reasons, but most of all because no one could tell the dumb children from the smart children anymore” (1995: 99). Reducing emotional stress with regards to exams is crucial for all students – but it is especially crucial for those (e.g., some of the students in this study) who experience emotional stress and exhibit suicidal-like behaviours (Bedwani, 2001).

7.9 Student 9

This student is seventeen years old. He is in Grade 9 and has repeated Grades 6 and 8. He is the oldest of the four boys in his family. He mentioned that his younger brothers are copying some of his behaviours like fighting and smoking. His parents are separated and he does not live with either of them. He lives with

foster parents on weekends when he is away from this residential centre. French is the primary language spoken in his home. Both parents have a Secondary 4 education. His father works in a sawmill and mother does not work. He has moved five times in the last five years and has changed two schools in the same amount of time. He is in placement because of regularly skipping school, physical and verbal aggression, disobeying his parents and problems with stepparents. He indicated that he will be in placement until age of majority (18 years old). The following is this student's description of himself as a person and as a student:

“As a person I'm probably friendly, respectful and probably like helpful. As a student I think that it means like you work hard. You do what you have to do, and you do get on with what you have to do to get further in life. I know what the consequences are if I don't work harder.”

When the student was asked to talk about his likes and dislikes of the schools he had attended including his present school, he mentioned the pros and cons of his present school. But he chose not to remark on his previous schools by saying, “I don't remember anything about the school I left.” However, as the interview progressed he mentioned an unpleasant incident he witnessed in a public school. Here are his remarks:

“ I think this school has a good program because of the like smaller classes. The people get – like I'm closer to the teachers. The teachers are always there to help them around the schoolwork. And the bad thing is, since the classes are so small the students get used to having someone beside them all the time so it won't help them much when they are on the outside. Also there should be more respect for each other because people here don't have respect for each other at all. In the regular school some of the teachers are more like crazy. Crazy is like picking up a desk and almost throwing it at a student. I think that being aggressive is the problem on the outside. Like the teacher has bad days, so he is taking it out on his students. Like we don't take out our aggressivity on the teachers!”

The student revealed that he likes working on projects and other activities that call for physical involvement, but he dislikes sitting in class and doing work.

He finds it boring. This is what he had to say:

“I like some of the work on projects, and other ways you get involved – such as ITT (Introduction to Technology), electricity. Wood projects and mechanics. I like fooling around with cars. You get used to working on projects, but the classwork I hate. I just hate it! I also like working on projects about - like animals, drugs and abuse. But classwork – they are too long. Sometimes the teacher make us do like 10 hundred exams per day – especially French. I don’t like French. French is my real language – my first language, but the French they teach me here is of no use because I know all my French. It’s very boring, too easy and too long. The class time is only 50 minutes; it’s the work that’s long. She gives us like 10 pages.”

The student was asked about his interest in being in school and here is his response:

“I want to be in school for to get good marks for later on – to graduate and to have more work on the outside. And if I don’t come to school the consequences are I will never get passed. I will never get to my goal – part of being successful.”

What do you understand by the word success? To this question the student replied:

“Successful is being someone who makes a goal for himself in the world and in life. And being successful probably is getting to your goal that you made. My goal for now is that I’m back in school like I’m supposed to and want to be. And now, probably I can graduate next year or the next year after. In school now I’m probably successful in Home Economics.”

This student suggests that he is getting the help he needs from his present school, but schools should have more psychologists to help students to talk about their problems if they are to be successful. Here are his views:

“Doing Home Economics will probably help me when I’m going to be in my own apartment. And in my next school I go to, it will help me to get a job – stage. The teachers also help me study around what I like – like mechanics and help me think more about what I’m going to do later on. But in schools, there is these people who work there – psychologists - to help you find out what’s wrong and to

listen to you, and help you understand everything about yourself. But I don't think there is enough of them. They need more of them like to listen to kids who have problems."

This student has selected his dad to be his role model because he admires the way his dad works. Here are his views about his dad:

"My dad – probably he is the only one who is my role model. I like his way – the way he works at his job. It's like he knows how to work the sawmill. He encourages me a lot to continue school. When I have something nagging me or anything, he's always there to help me. I will just keep on following my dad. Keep on looking on what he does and stuff like that."

The student indicated that he had many friends and some of his friends are with him in the residential centre in which he is now placed. Here is what he had to say about his friends:

"I have lots of friends. There is some friends up here. We go out a lot – like we go camping. We go out to movies and we hang around here and we talk mostly. We like to play pool and go bowling. I have lots of Black friends and just as many White friends and Asian friends. They are all pretty much the same stuff. One of them dropped out this year because he did not find that the people there are mature enough at the school he was going. He also dropped out because he was having problems with his father because he divorced his mother. He needed time to think about what he had done. He is 17, but he is going to school next year for trade school. He talks to me about mostly everything. He doesn't like the work and he is not confident in what he does in that school. So he says he wants to get a job and keep on working until he goes back to school. I like my friends to have respect – that's the first thing. The second thing is like the relationship where people like listen to you. They don't like turn around and go to others all the time or they hang around and being used."

This student commented that he wanted to graduate from high school. At the end of his high school years, he plans to get a job where he will be able to earn about three hundred dollars every two weeks. He also suggested that schools can help him to be successful if they allowed him to study the subjects that he wishes to study so that he will be prepared for the job market. Here are his words:

"Schools will help me to get educated properly and learn the subjects I want to work on so that I get better at it before going out for a job."

What do you think schools can do to stop students from dropping out? To this question the student replied:

“There’s not much that they can do really because the people who drop out want to drop out. It’s just the students – it’s their choice to make life what they want it to be.”

7.10 Student 10

This Grade 11 student is eighteen years old. He is repeating Grade 11 for the third time. He is the oldest of three children in his family. He commented that his two younger siblings, “Copy all the bad things they’ve seen me done.” His father is French Canadian and his mother is English Canadian, so both French and English are spoken in his home. His parents are divorced and he lives with his mother and stepfather. His father works in a tire factory and his mother does landscaping. Both parents graduated from high school. In the last five years he has changed his residence twenty times and changed four schools in the same amount of time. He has been placed previously in a group home, and a foster home. He indicated that his reasons for placement are verbal and physical aggression, problems with his siblings and his stepfather. When his placement in this residential centre ends, he will not return home to live with his mother and stepfather. He will move into his own apartment and will continue to be monitored for a period of three months by Batshaw Youth and Family Centres. The following is this student’s description of himself as a student:

“As a student, I study hard. I try to do all my work as possible. If I don’t understand what I’m supposed to do I always talk with my teachers in private, so I can understand what I’m doing – just so that I don’t put off my work for the last minute. I would say that I’m a smart student and a happy student. School here

now is going great. A lot of classes – it's easier to work. When I was at my old school – it wasn't going too well. I did all my work and that, but I would be getting into trouble with my friends during lunch hours and stuff. Because we were not allowed smoking and we would do that to break the rule. And because of my stupidity I was kicked out of school. I was supposed to graduate last year but because I got kicked out I didn't graduate. So I'm realizing now that I was stupid."

The student was asked to talk about what he liked and disliked about school and here is what he had to say:

"Like some of my classes. I like the way the program is set up here. In the other schools, it depends on how long the periods are. I like being with my friends in this school – that's something. I like certain classes like the gym. I like most of my teachers. Again, I like being with my friends! I don't like following rules – that's one of the things. Let's say the teacher would give me an assignment and it's supposed to be on what you think. They want to know how you feel about it, but it's not to the teacher's satisfaction. The teacher would start criticizing me and stuff. So they cover up the way the teachers teach – and that's not cool. I'm criticized because it's not up to what the teachers think. Sometimes the periods are appear long – especially Math and French. French is my good subject, but we don't do anything exciting. It's just work, work, work – like exams, tests and all that stuff. My other teachers try to make learning fun, but my French teacher doesn't seem to do this. She is always writing, writing, writing. My Math – is because I don't really understand it too well so it's very long."

The student was asked about the interest he has in school now and this was his reply:

"I have lots of interest in school now. I want to finish my high school so I can go to college – get a degree in something I'm good at, so I can get a good job. I repeated Grade 11 three times because my social worker kept on changing my placement so it affected my school year. I went to one school at the end of the school so I missed the beginning and the middle."

What do you understand by the word success? To this question the respondent answered:

"Success would be like you succeed. It's hard to explain – you do what you can. How can I explain that? O.K. Success would be doing what you can to reach a goal, so when you come to that goal, you can keep going to make other goals. You get better at it, and eventually you will succeed. If not, you will try and try again."

When the student was asked to talk about some of the things at which he is successful, he said:

“Successful - I am a good worker. I grew up on a farm, so I can do hard work. Like in school - I sit down, I do my work and I don't fool around. Well, most of the time anyway. I am good at sports. I can play a lot of sports. I play hockey and basketball, and football. I used to play football for my old high school. I was on their team. Baseball and hockey would be just like in the park whatever. I would go and play with my friends.”

This student suggested that some public schools offer opportunities to students who are experiencing difficulties to succeed. Here are his views:

“Teachers – teachers because they can help you learn and they will keep after you till you learn it. They set up programs so that if you don't understand you go after school and get a tutor, so they can show you how to do it. Basically, they care for you. They don't give up. They want you to succeed. So they will do anything in their power to help you and don't give up.”

Although this respondent was repeating Grade 11 for the third time, he did not regard the school system as having anything to do with his failure. He remarked that all his failures in school were completely of his doing. He said:

“Failing in school was all my fault, because I wasn't too serious, you know. Because throughout elementary school and up to Grade 10, school will be easy, you know. I didn't start working. I could do it on my own just like that you know. It was too easy! Then when I got to Grade 11 I was so cocky, I didn't really bother with the work. You have to earn your marks. Maybe, if I was challenged to do harder work, it might have been better for me. Most likely I wouldn't have thought the way I did and I would have graduated already.”

What can the school do to help you to succeed? When this question was asked of the student he expressed the view that to be a successful student, the school would need to teach him skills that he would find useful for the work force. This is what he had to say:

“They can teach me (like) they can show me how to do stuff. Well, like in the future – they could give me some skills for a job, you know. Like learn how to write a

problem and stuff like that. I will actually be able to use. For Math you know - so I will be able to do my income tax and stuff like that. Practical stuff - every day stuff.”

This respondent remarked that he was enjoying this school, because he now finds learning to be fun. He said:

“Learning is kind of fun because the Math class is a small class. Sometimes there are 10 students in the class, sometimes there are under ten, sometimes seven and sometimes three you know - it depends. It’s not like my other schools because they are bigger. So in this class you actually sit one on one with the teacher’s help, so like I feel that it’s satisfactory. So he can show me to do it, and stuff like that.”

Here is this student’s description of how he copes with exams:

“Sometimes I deal well with exams. Sometimes I do not do so well. I know what I’m doing when I’m really focused, but sometimes I just freeze and forget everything so I just relax. Like now, I’m relaxed. But sometimes, let’s say I studied for something and I really got it down pat. It depends on how the question is written out. I look at the question to find if there is a key word in it, then I can get it. But if I read a question that I really don’t understand, then I panic – and oh, I don’t know what to do and I don’t want to fail the exam, you know – like in Math.”

The student indicated that English, Moral Education and computer were his favourite classes in that school; and he describes some of the qualities of his favourite teachers this way:

“They’re easy going. They work well with us, you know. They actually take time. Say if you have a problem they sit down and talk with you. They are more – they just don’t say, “Oh cut it out!” They’ll get right to the point because if you have a problem they will sit down and talk to you. But if you do something that is bad they will warn you. They won’t wait till the end of the class to tell you. They’re still there for you. They are nice and they are polite. They don’t put you down or nothing you know. They respect you just as how you are supposed to respect them. Just like a buddy or a friend – just like that!”

The student is hoping to graduate from high school this year, but if he doesn’t graduate he plans to join the work force.

7.11 Student 11

This student is fourteen years old and is in Grade 7. He repeated grade 1, and has changed four schools in the last five years. Three of the four schools that he has attended are social affairs schools. He is the second born of the six children in his family. His father is Italian and his mother is Egyptian. His parents are divorced and he and his five siblings live with their mother. His mother did not complete high school. She works in her home, sewing clothing for a factory. His father is learning to speak English and he works at a fruit store.

The respondent was asked to describe himself as a student and then as a person. To this question he replied:

“As a student, I like basketball, I like football and I like hockey. I want to stay in school. I want to get a good paying job to take care of my family – look after my brother, my mom and my father. And I want to have a normal life – not to be in placement or nothing like that. I wouldn’t say I’m smart because I’m not smart. But I’m good in Math. I wouldn’t say I’m smart, smart. I know a couple of things in Math. I’m good in French. In English, I wouldn’t consider myself smart. I have a couple of problems. In French I still have a couple of problems even though I went to French school for 5 years. In Math, I still have a little trouble, so I wouldn’t consider myself really smart. Well, I like my life (in school) it’s cool. I am not exactly a kind person because I get into a lot of fights. If someone really hated me and we get into a fight I’m going to feel bad because I got into a fight, and then both us - me and the other guy who got in the fight are going to get hurt. And so I don’t really think I could call myself a nice guy. When I really get insulted by someone I start swearing and making threats. I wouldn’t call myself a nice guy, but a medium kinda guy. Sometimes I could be nice and sometimes I could be really mean.”

The student was asked if he spoke Italian, and his reply was, “No, I only know swear words in Italian, and I just use swear words.” The student was asked if he was working hard in school, and he said:

“Yes, sometimes. But sometimes when I don’t feel good, I don’t feel like working – that’s when I sleep. I ask the teacher if I can leave the classroom and I can go and relax. Sometimes I want to really do my work, and I work very fast and

I get a couple of mistakes because I do it fast. When I really want to work and do good in school, I take my time and read the question like three or four times over and keep on making sure it's the right answer with the teacher. And if it's not the right answer, I read the question over. I read the question over and again. And then, I finally answer the question until I get it right. I keep on trying."

The student was asked to talk about the schools he attended. This is what he had to say:

"Well, the first school that I changed like it was a French school. That's why I always skip it, because over there they keep calling me names and I got into like six fights in the first week of school. Because I used to put my hair in a ponytail like this and they used to call me a girl because I have a pony tail and I have long hair. And I used to tell them shut up and then they used to talk back to me. They said I really initiated them. I pushed them and they pushed me back and I hit them. They call me fat boy. They call me - and I don't want to say it because it's - a piece of do-do, and things like that. And I didn't appreciate that so I used to get into a fight with them. The first week that I started school over there I got into six fights with six kids and so I decided that I'm not going to go to that school because I'm going to keep on getting into fights so they send me to a group home. Then again, I was in another reception centre and I went to school there. And then, in that school I know everybody over there, so I wouldn't get into fights. I got into fight with nobody at that school. And then - O.K, I got discharged from that centre and I got graduated in 6th grade from there. Then I went to another school. Then I used to skip everyday in that school. Because in the classrooms O.K. I used to do my homework and teachers used to say, 'No, it's not done!' I used to have the homework in front of their face. They say, 'No, it's not done!' They would kick me out and they send me back home to the group home. Then I came the next morning. I go back, I said to myself, 'If I did my homework they gonna kick me out like they did yesterday.' So I stayed in the mall all day. I never wanted to go to school so they shipped me here for six months."

When the student was asked what he disliked about school, he remarked that when teachers treated him unfairly and shouted at him those things bothered him. He also disliked when students teased him. This is the way he expressed himself:

"Well, I don't like people - like the teacher O.K, if you do your homework and they say you didn't do it. And if like he asked you to read and you're reading and you don't read long (loud) enough O.K, they shouldn't raise their voice and yell at you. I don't like kids and everything calling other people names. That hurt people and stuff. Like some people, they make fun of their moms and stuff - and that's why I think most of the fights happen - kids insulting my mom. So that's what I don't like about people - calling other people names and stuff like that."

How much interest do you have in being in school now? To this question the student replied:

“Well me, I have more interest now because me, I live a valuable life now. Me, I screw up one more time – I’m in what you call it? Placement until I’m 18. I don’t want that to happen so I’m going to stay in school and do the best I can to get a good paying job to support my mom my dad and my brother. Because my brother – he told me that he is going to drop out next year when he is 16. Because now the legal law – I don’t know why the hell they did that – this law. They should not be allowed to drop out even at 18. Now when you are 16 years old you are allowed dropping out of school. Me, I should say like when you are 20 that you are allowed out of school, because that’s not normal. Sixteen year olds - outside roaming the streets and everything. That’s how more crime starts. They make this stupid law that when you are 16 years old you are allowed to decide if you want to drop out or stay in school. That’s pretty dumb!”

When the student was asked about his understanding of the word success, this is what he had to say:

“Well, if you are like a good student you finished high school and you go to college or university, you want success – like succeed. If you are studying for – to be in politics and you succeed - you end up in politics and that’s your success. You want to be in politics and you go to school to train to go to politics for that and then you might end up in politics like your dream. If you want to do (work at) it. That’s what I think about success. Well, me! I think I’m successful in sports. I’m good in basketball. That’s why I want to go to college to be in a college basketball team so I could play on it and with the NBA. That’s my dream – to go to the NBA Basketball - Pro Basketball.”

The student suggested that his present school offers him some important opportunities to realize his dream and be successful. These are his views:

“Well, this school offers me the opportunity to be in the gym! In gym, I could practice and stuff, and like practice and practice until I’m better. And in college if they have a basketball team - I could try out. I could try out for the basketball team, and if I do good I might go in. And during the weekends when I’m home, I go to the park to practice my basketball. Like to improve my basketball so I could do better. I also beat my brother at basketball.”

This student expressed the view that the school system has not failed him because for the most part, schools have provided him with all he needs to be

successful. However, he remarked that some public schools did not provide the help he sought. For example, the schools did not effectively deal with the problems he experienced with other students. He was always being teased because he appeared to be different so he frequently got into fights. In his view, the problem of being teased was left unresolved. The student also revealed that the public schools did not allow him to be involved in his learning and his interests were usually ignored. But he perceives the social affairs schools as providing him with adequate service. Here are his views:

“No, the school did not fail me ‘cause - the school gives you what you need to work right? And properly-not like all scribbled, and stuff like that. So that is - they are trying to teach me – to do the work properly. They give it back to you to do it until you do it properly. In this school they give me everything I need. Like in gym period they let me play basketball. Let’s say - I ask a gym teacher, ‘Can I play basketball? - Because I want to improve my basketball.’ He says, ‘No problem.’ I told him my goal and he says that he thinks it’s a wonderful idea to go for that goal! And the English teacher has this - like - look at me. Me too, I want to be a writer. I like writing story, but write horror books and stuff like that. I want to do that and she tells me it’s a good idea. She tries to let me improve my story writing. And the last thing I wrote I got 80% and the last one I got was 73%. And in French -I want to be like - in French I just want to improve my reading and writing in French because even though I went to French school for 5 years I still want to improve in French.”

Then he added:

“The other schools - they did me the same thing – they don’t allow you to play basketball. If you ask, they do one activity for the whole group. If you don’t know how to do it, you still have to do it. If you don’t know how to play or whatever, they teach you how to play it. If you still don’t understand, they still make you play it. So that’s why I don’t want to go to those two particular schools. And because of the people over there, making fun of me and stuff.”

When the student was asked to talk about how he finds learning in school, he said:

“Well, I think it’s good because in English - before I came here in English I didn’t know how to write, I know how to read words like dog, or of, or stuff like

that. I didn't know words before, but now I know how to read and write big stories and stuff like that. But my writing has to improve though."

How do you deal with low grades? To this question, the student replied:

Low grades? Well, I try to improve the grade in the subject that I have poor grade. I try to improve in that subject. Well, I had 41 and failed - no 51, and I failed. And now I have to do a two page composition on the computer. And I have to do my drawing assignment so I could get my grades up. I have to do my typing - to follow those rules, or whatever. I have to do good in class and I have to do whatever they tell me and so I could - like we have to do tests. Because like the typing O.K., we have to finish all 14 tests and all the other kids that are in there ask me to like help them with the tests and I ask Will and Will says 'No' and I still go do it. That's why I came in - that's why I have poor marks because I help other kids and don't do my work and because I don't get my things in on time."

The student was asked to talk about how he copes with exams, and he said:

"Well, in exams I feel nervous you know, but I keep on thinking I might do good."

The student indicated that his favourite subject was Math because he could recite the multiplication tables from 2 to 12. This is his explanation:

"My favorite subject is Math. Well, I know all my times tables by heart and any day you could ask me any multiplication I could say it anytime. My brother is in 9th Grade, and he still doesn't know his times tables and I'm in grade 7 and I know all mine."

The student was asked to describe his favorite teacher, and the following is his description:

"My favourite teacher is my Home EC. teacher. She is a woman. Well she just loves you and stuff like that. Like she says jokes - a lot of jokes, and she's cool. I think she's cool! Everybody else thinks she's cool because well, she is not like the older Home Ec teachers. They don't like teaching. They just let us do cookies and stuff like that, but she asks us what we want to do. Like let's say we're supposed to do souvlaki and last week we did milk shakes, we did banana split. We did all kinds of stuff. We did roast potatoes or something. We do all kinds of things. Like cooking for a restaurant - we did rice crispy squares. We do all kinds of things, where as with the other Home EC. teacher, we had to do one thing every week you nuh! But with this teacher we decide what to do - the whole class. O.K., we wrote what we want to do. And if there is a majority the majority wins. Then if

there is three over two, we do that. Like if three chooses souvlaki and two chooses rice crispy squares, we do souvlaki, but we don't know."

The student was asked to talk about the person who has been the kindest to him in school and out of school.

"The kindest person - well, my cousin Marilyn. Well, she used to go to the same school and we used to fool around. But the only thing - O.K, that she does - well like me, I take it just like that because she has a habit. She gives me a little slap across the head when I swear. Like that just reminds me - and that's what I think. My cousin is doing a good thing of helping me and reminding me like that, so I don't screw up and get sent out. Outside the school - it would be my mom, my dad and my step-mom and all my friends who respect me. They treat me O.K. I treat them with respect. They treat me with respect."

Then he added:

"My mom helps me and always corrects me. My mom when she corrects me, she says to me, "If you don't stay in school, you end up a bum. You going end up not able to have a job. You going end up being on welfare, and stuff like that. I don't want to be on welfare and stuff like that. I want a good job. I want to work and stuff like that. My brother doesn't want to work, he wants to stay on welfare and stuff like that."

When the student was asked about his role models he selected two famous basketball players from the NBA. The following are his views about his role models:

"Some people would say like firemen - they save people's lives and stuff like that. But my biggest role model is Michael Jordan and Shaquille O'Neil. Well, Michael Jordan - O.K. before he quit the basketball business - he likes all his fans. He appreciates all his fans that go to his games and like supported him while he played. And he told everybody on TV or on interview at a press conference that everybody should stay in school and stuff like that. And Shaquille O'Neil because he is a basketball player, he is a rapper - he raps. He has about 14 albums and I have like half of them at home. Because when he plays basketball, he concentrates so much on the game. When the crowd is booing Shaquille O'Neil he doesn't care. He is just fixed on the game and focuses to win. That's his goal of winning the game. I try to copy some of Michael Jordan's moves. I put up a basketball hoop in my yard - high enough so I could dunk it, and I do the Michael Jordan dunk and the Shaquille O'Neal dunk and I just started a three point shot."

Then he added:

“Well, like Steven King - he’s a horror book writer. I forgot to tell you he is my role model too. Like he succeeded on doing horror books and stuff. And if I have a good enough story, have a horror story and I’ll send it to a publisher. And he publishes it - might get my goal to become a writer.”

The student remarked that he had many friends. Here is what he had to say about his friends:

“I have about 20 to 50 friends because the building that I live in is in the middle of the yard and there are many, many apartments in that building. Like it’s a big, big building but its cut - they’re separated. Like 8 buildings in one - like that. So, I know everybody - like in my whole neighbourhood where the buildings are. I know everybody there. So, I know most of the whole neighbourhood. So my friends - girls and guys, we go play basketball in the park. We play baseball and wrestling sometimes. We don’t wrestle no more because when me and my brother and my friends wrestle, sometimes we hit them for real and we get in a big fight. That’s why I don’t want to wrestle with them no more. When they ask me to go play wrestle I say, ‘No, I want to go play hockey, or baseball or football, or touch football.’ All my friends - they’re all the same and some of them come from Jamaica, from Haiti, from Italy, from Spain and from the East End. Some of them came from - from what you call it - from France. These two kids that live in my district, they come from France and everybody hates them. But me and my brother we like them ‘cause of their accent. It’s fun - we like how they talk! We think it’s funny that’s why we keep on hanging around with them. Like we go to their house, we play nintendo. They come to our house, we play games and stuff. We play card games, we play ass-hole. We play poker and sometimes we play 21. We play Go Fish. We play a game that’s like, it’s a swear word. It’s a swear word, but I won’t say it because its inappropriate. And we play all kinds of games.”

Later he added:

“And sometimes we just fool around - like we ride my bike and we make races. Like bikers can go around. It’s a bicycle path and we go by and do racing and stuff. And whoever wins that day - like when they win the losers will have to buy a chocolate bar for them. And whoever loses - they don’t have to buy chocolate bar for the losers. But the winners have to give half of the chocolate bar to the losers. So everybody wins - losers get half and winners get half.”

How do most of your friends feel about school? To this question, the student replied:

"Most of them - like everybody goes to school. But when they're not in school, like on weekends they like say, 'Oh school sucks!' And things like. And when they say that in front of me I say, 'which school sucks?' And well, they go - they say where they go to school. They all go to Catholic schools you nuh! And I say, 'When you're sixteen you're going to drop out or stay in school?' And they shut their mouth like that because I say, 'When you're sixteen you're gonna drop out or stay in school?' Like three quarters of the people with us are going to stay in school and the quarter say that they are going to leave. Most of them are having difficulty in English. They don't really act something. If you act - like in literature - like when you say like a little letter is missing. And when you do like a play in different way you say it. And they go to school to improve their words."

When the student was asked if he knew any one who had dropped out of school he said:

"Yes, my friend Steven and my friend Lotto. My friend Matthew - he is seventeen and he dropped out of school. My friend Matthew - he used to be here. He used to be in my English class and you know he used to go to school and say it sucks and sucks. He used to get into a lot of fights. He used to tell off the teachers and he said he is dropping out of school when he is sixteen. He finally reached sixteen and he dropped out and he started drinking beer. He drinks beer after beer every day for the whole day. He said this in school 'it's better drinking beer!' And when he was going to school he brought beer at the corner of the house. And when I was coming back he says, 'Come and drink a beer with me!' I said, 'Yes, I will drink a beer.' I opened it and I go next to the garbage can when I opened it I take a beer and put it in the garbage can while he was looking away."

This student also has friends who are wards of the court. He mentions the friends, the reason for their placements and the group homes, or reception centre where each person is placed. Here are his remarks about those friends:

"Raphael and Steven and my cousin, Marilyn - I call her a friend, and they all are in placement now. My friend Matthew was in placement because he was drinking beer and he got caught by the police when he was not in school. James, he used to be at Cross Roads with me. Now he is in Lindsay. My friend Darren, he used to be at Cross Roads with me too. Now he is in Rudel. My friend Ryan, now he is in - what you call it? The group home right across from Cross Roads? I don't remember the name and now he is in Odyssey and my friend Mary - she used to be at another school as a student, and now she is in a group home. And she was put in placement but her father abuses and disturb her and stuff. That's why they took her away and put her in a group home where he can't find her and stuff."

For the future, this student plans to graduate from high school so that he could go to college and be drafted on a basketball team. This is how he expresses his views about his future:

“When I graduate from high school, I’m going to college. I’m going to go to college to make the basketball team.”

When the student was asked how much money he would like to earn, he indicated that he was not concerned about how much he earned as long as he able to get a job. But later it appeared that he had difficulty in making an appropriate association with work and how much he wanted to earn. He said:

“I don’t care as long as I got a job! Not just like basketball. It could be like basketball - or just a job too, but it could be any job. I have a job and then I’ll be satisfied you nuh! Like I’d play basketball game and we’d have fun. I’m not sure how much money I could earn - I’m not ten hundred million or whatever. A reasonable pay - about \$8.75/hr or something like that. If I don’t get my goal in basketball - in basketball you get paid a lot - say 1.2 million a year and stuff like that. In wrestling O.K, Hulk Hogan, he gets paid 30 million a year. But, I’m looking - like first I’m going to get a regular job -like working at a grocery store or something where I get paid \$8.75/hr or like the \$6/hr I’m working at right now!”

The student suggested that he will be successful in school, “Because I’m too young to screw up my life.” The student was asked to give his views on what schools could do to prevent students from dropping out, and he said:

I don’t know! Like, they could like persuade you, or whatever they do. Like why do you want to drop out when you could have a good decent job? They could try to persuade you to stay in school, you nuh! Me - right now I’m going through - I tell my brother, ‘If you don’t go to school, you’re gonna eat shit.’ I don’t care, he’s gonna be mad at me if I drop out of school. Me, I’m gonna be mad at him because if he really drops out of school. O.K, he leaves the house and everybody would have come back from school and then he will be 18 already. And that’s all I have to say, ‘Is to stay in school.’ So, if a kid, like he goes to school and I do persuade him to stay in school because he wants to be a mechanic. How can he be a mechanic without going to school? That’s why I’m trying to convince him to stay in school.”

TABLE 5

Grade retention

Historically, grade retention has been a common form of intervention for students who perform poorly in class (Penna, 2002). Shepard and Smith (1989) have demonstrated that students who drop out of school are five times more likely to have repeated grades than those who graduated and that a student who is retained once, has a thirty-five percent chance of dropping out of school. Consistent with previous research, Goldschmidt and Wang (1999) emphasized that grade retention is the single strongest predictor of students at risk to drop out of school. Although studies reveal that grade retention does very little to improve school achievement or social adjustments (Holmes and Matthews, 1984), it appears that educators still do not fully understand why some students who repeat grades eventually drop out (Penna, 2002; School administrator interviewed in this project, 1999). All students in this project have repeated at least one grade and are therefore at risk of dropping out.

One of the school administrators in this study characterized grade retention as redundancy rather than remediation. He chastises the policy makers in the school system for their insensitivity to the negative social, emotional and academic impact that grade retention has on students. Besides contributing to the dropout phenomenon, studies have indicated that grade retention often contributes to the stigma attached to slow learners (McGinn et. al, 1992) and has serious implication for the lowering of students' self-esteem (House, 1989).

Meta-analysis of 63 studies done in the United States found that low-achieving students who were promoted generally performed better than similar students who were retained: "On average, retained children are worse off than their counterparts on both personal adjustment and academic outcomes" (Holmes, 1989: 27). In addition, McGinn and his colleagues (1992) suggested that long term effects of retention were more pronounced than short term. In their study of retention in Honduras, they observed that, "The factors that contribute to repeating are not removed by making the students repeat" (McGinn et. al, 1992). Grade retention is also costly to society, for the direct and opportunity cost of keeping a student longer in school rises with the age of the student (Williams, 2000).

7.12 Student 12

This student is fourteen years old. He is in Grade 7 and repeated Grade 3. He is the first born of four children in his family. He has changed his place of abode six times in the last five years and has changed three schools in the same

period. He has previously lived in group homes and another residential centre. He is in the care of his grandmother and visits with her when he leaves the campus for his weekends. He mentioned that his mom's boyfriend is a construction worker and his mom does baby sitting for a living. His father has an elementary level education, but he does not know the level of education his mother has. He has been placed because of physical and verbal aggression, running away from home, disobeying his parents and having problems with his siblings.

This student appears to have an intrinsic value for learning. When this student was asked to describe himself as a person and as a student, he said:

"As a person, I've heard people say I've a good heart and I really care about others – like if something happens I'll be like there to help and to do something. As a student, I'm– pretty much a smart person. I'm passing and getting good marks. Math - I have a little bit of difficulty and in French – but I'm pulling off O.K."

When the student was asked to talk about what he likes and dislikes about school, he indicated that he liked some of the courses that he was working on in this school. He remarked that he did not like some teachers because they nagged. This is what he had to say:

"I like some of the things I do in this school. I like football, basketball, English, MRE and Home EC. But I don't like some of the teachers. They sometimes nag you for the little things, and like get on your back. For - like I did something wrong - like something like, they don't like my writing or something. They'll tell me and after, they'll make me do the whole thing over or something. To me, that is pretty much a little thing."

The student remarked that he had failed a grade because he had not studied hard enough. This is the way he expressed himself:

"I guess failed Grade 3 because I didn't - like concentrate on the work. I was distracted with the other kids."

When this student was asked to talk about what the word success means to him, he said:

“Success means to do something well. To try to do the best you can do. I try to do my best on my tests and if all goes well at least I tried. I’m successful in football, basketball, English, MRE, Home EC., and Independent Living because I put my mind into it and I care about those things a lot.”

The student suggested that this school is satisfying his needs. So if he works harder in school he can achieve the goal he has set for himself.

“I’m learning pretty good. I’ve been learning more this year than I’ve learned before. Smaller classes - like so the teacher could come when I usually need it, but not always. But it occurred to me that I could do it if I really tried. So I did try and try to put my effort in. Now I put more effort into my work and pay attention to the work.”

The student stated that although he is now in Grade 7, and had changed three schools, he did not think that the schools had failed him. In his view, he had failed himself because of his poor attitude. This is the way he expressed his views:

“I failed - it was mostly in my attitude. I had - like in issues of people arguing or something, and I’m arguing back like some little kid. I feel that I haven’t had success in that way. I don’t fail my tests I just sit there and just put whatever down.”

Then he added:

“In my other school - it was good and everything. But I had to leave because I got myself in trouble there so they put me in here. I guess the kids I hang around with – they go steal little things. And I just didn’t want to pay attention. I guess I was mostly with the kids.”

The respondent was asked to talk about his view on how schools could help him in areas where he is failing, and he said:

“They can help me in maybe slowing down. Like paying attention more to me or something. Well, mostly not only me, but most of the other kids that I know that say the same thing. In some schools when you ask the teacher for help they don’t pay you any attention, so I just turn my back.”

When the student was asked about how he deals with low grades or failing a course, he replied:

“I don’t like it. I don’t like seeing me fail. Sometimes it happens but I just try next time.”

This student indicated that he does not like writing exams. He usually gets nervous in exams. He said:

“I study a week before and I study too that week. But, I get nervous in exam - don’t know what’s gonna happen. Don’t know what the results are gonna be.”

When the student was asked about his favourite subject, he said:

“My favourite subject is English. My teacher is nice. It’s pretty hard and we learn stuff about - like Romeo and Juliet and old English. It’s quite fun.”

The following is the student’s description of the qualities of his favourite teacher:

“My favourite teacher - she is caring. She asks me questions. She sees how I’ve been doing and she asks me questions when she comes in to the building – Do you think I’m gonna have a good day or something like that. So that helps.”

This student has chosen his uncle to be his role model because his uncle is the only member of his family who has completed high school. Here is how he expresses himself:

“My Uncle Danny - he is a role model for me. He knows me very well like inside out. He is really good in school. He is the only one in my family that went to every single bit. He finished high school and well, now he teaches Karate and everything. He helps me with my homework when I come back. He lives just down the street so if I need help – I ask him or my aunt.”

Then he mentioned:

“My grandmother and my aunt are also my role models. My aunt She helps me - like paying attention. She’s a really neat person that people like. She taught me mostly independent living. My aunt really taught me everything. But I copy some of the behaviours of my mom, I guess. She smiles a lot and I like smiling. She ain’t really my role model, because I’m not allowed to see her a lot.”

The student was asked to talk about his friends and he said:

“I have a lot of friends. I make a lot of big parties so I get like 100 people there. I have my cousin Trenton. He knows two of my friends. They do drugs and they drink and all that. Most of my friends live in the Point and N.D.G. Some of them are Chinese and some are Black. I used to get myself in trouble – drinking, doing drugs, breaking and entering in N.D.G., and things like that, but now I just go to little parties and movies. I used to like fighting all the time causing trouble and I chose them. I’d go where they would be doing that and there would be laughing, and there would be a gang and I’d like to do that so I’d go with them. My friends - they don’t like school. I know one that hates school - like he is in Lyle (Pavilion). Some of my friends are in placement now for B & E and some for family troubles.”

When the student was asked to describe some of the qualities he looks for in a friend, his answer was:

“Love, courteous - like they ain’t gonna talk behind my back or anything. Yeah –trust and kindness.”

Do you know anyone who has dropped out of school? To this question the student replied:

“Yeah! Adults - my uncle - my uncle and some of my uncles and that. My grandfather was in jail, that’s my uncles’ father. They didn’t have such a good life because their father was an alcoholic and that, so he wasn’t really good for them. If they didn’t work, they wouldn’t have nothing else.”

This student indicated that he plans to graduate from high school in the youth sector. After graduation, he would like to go to college. However, when he was asked about how much money he wanted to earn he was unable to give a definite answer. This is how he expressed himself:

“I want to graduate from high school and just keep on going - I think CEGEP and that. I would like to earn a fair amount of money - enough to buy a car. I’d like to own - like a car. It won’t happen right away! But I don’t know how much - about five thousand or ten thousand. I’ve been playing football for five years now. I’ve been playing football practically all my life, so I may be a football player. But I don’t know how much money they make. All I know is that they make good money. Five - five, they make a lot! Say three or something. Three, four, five - They get it two weeks, per month or something.”

The student remarked that for him to succeed in school, the teachers will have to help him by allowing him to work at his present pace and not push him to work faster. He also suggested that some students may need to stay in school longer than the time allotted if they are to be successful. Here are his remarks:

“I want to be successful, but teachers - they are going at the normal pace that I’m going at now so they should stay at a pace that I am right now, not too fast. They should slow down for those people who can’t keep up with the fast pace and pay attention. Most of them will have to stay to get teach some more. So some people will have to stay in school for a longer time than others. Maybe even to twenty years old or something - in the regular school.”

At this point, the student showed signs of weariness. When he was asked if he was tired, he said, “Yes!” The interview was then terminated.

7.13 Student 13

This student is fourteen years old. He is in Grade 7 and is repeating this grade. He lives at home with his biological parents. He is the younger of the two children in his family. He has moved once in the last five years and changed three schools in that time. His dad is a forklift operator and his mother does not work outside the home. He has been placed previously in a foster home, but now he is placed in a residential centre for truancy. When this student was asked to describe himself as a student and then as a person, he said:

“As a student, I’m in Grade 7 here, but I’m supposed to be in Grade 8. I didn’t finish Grade 7. I didn’t do my exams, because I was doing home schooling and they didn’t send me the exams. I like doing Math. I like getting my work done. I like getting good grades and stay out of trouble sometimes. In some subjects I’m smart. As a person, I’m somebody who likes getting into trouble a lot. Sometimes I’m a helpful person and sometimes, I’m a sort of happy person.”

The student was asked to talk about what he liked and disliked about school.

Here are his views:

“I don’t like the way it’s set up. In here we don’t have enough stuff. Like in Woodshop - we don’t have enough wood. The wood cost too much - they can’t get enough. Auto mechanics, we have to get old cars from everybody and stuff like that - that need fixing and all that. They’ve been really underpaid more than the kids. Well, they are too much underpaid, and teachers are really cranky. Yes, really cranky to us. Because of budget cuts and all that - and not enough teachers to help the kids. And last but not least – not enough school supplies for the kids - like books and all that. It’s annoying!”

How much interest do you have in being in school right now? To this question the student replied:

“Enough to get through the year - try and pass. Try and get all my subjects up in the grades and all that. I don’t have all that much time left for this year, I’ll have to fix some. Everything I screwed up on. I have about two weeks - it’s enough!”

When the student was asked to talk about what success means to him, he said:

“Success is like the way you are going to get on - like a good job to support your family and all that. And try and help people and do everything you can. If somebody is successful - it would like somebody who has a real life. Value everybody - in touch with everybody and know their way. And speak their way in a nice way and help them out when they need help. Like Moses in the Bible – he was successful. Math, Art, Computers, Woodshop, Gym and MRE - all of them I’ve been successful in, all except French and English.”

The student stated that his present school is helping him to achieve some success because of small class sizes. But in the public school, there were not enough teachers to give him the attention he needed.

“In this school, I get the help I need because you know there is small class. The teacher can go discuss and help you if you need it. She doesn’t have to grab 50 or 60 students before she gets to you and all that, so it’s easy for her. Here there are six or eight of us in a class – and sometimes only four of us are in class. But in the outside schools there is not enough teachers and school supplies.”

Here the student expresses his views about some of the most important opportunities this school offers him to be successful. He said:

“You get all the help you need when you need it here. The teachers all know when you don’t want to be bothered, they don’t bother you. They help you when they can. If you need somebody to speak to, just ask to speak to a teacher. They give you a lot of help around here. But in the other schools we know that we really don’t count. That’s the only opportunity we had.”

When the student was asked if he thought that the schools that ignored his needs had failed him, this is what he said:

“No, the schools did not fail me. The only person who has not helped himself to succeed is the person that controls his life. If you don’t want their help, they can’t help you. That’s the way it works! They couldn’t help me! I was in too much trouble.”

The student expressed the view that when students are in a lot of trouble in the public schools they can’t be helped because they (the students) have the perception that they are not wanted.

“Kids can’t be helped when there is a lot of trouble because they just don’t want the kids. They don’t want to help them. They just say good-bye! When they get in too much trouble they just say, ‘Don’t even bother, you’re a trouble maker just leave!’ So they ship them out and send them to another school.”

When the student was asked to give his views on how schools can stop shipping out those students who are usually in trouble and help them? He replied:

“Suspend them a lot more? I don’t think so, for there was a lot of suspension in school. If they had anymore suspensions, everybody would be out of the classes by now. So well, there is no answer that they can help us. The ones that want to fail, they are going to fail. The ones that want to pass are gonna pass.”

The student indicated that learning in school can be great for him, but only:

“When the subject is good, not boring. And with like someone that you can at least understand and be amused with.”

The student said that he does not like to get low marks. He finds it annoying.

Here is how he deals with low marks:

“I don’t like low grades - it’s annoying. But you let it go and then go for a like ride and think hard and loosen up and something. I just usually think what I should do to change my grade to turn them around and how. Then I think what I should do is to get my act together and to quit screwing around and do whatever I do.”

The student indicated that he does not like writing exams. But he suggested that he does well on some exams. Here are his views:

“In exams everything is gone from my head and body. Like a ... I don’t know! Like I just came of a ... I don know it. But some exams I do, like in Math and maybe English, but French is a problem. And then all I think is that I can do my best and achieve my goal. That’s all I really know.

The following is a description of the student’s favourite subject:

“My favourite subject - it will have to be Math because it’s so interesting. Like you learn about different things like angles. Everything you learn. There’s not just one thing in the world like talking and all that. You’ve to learn the angles - how to add, subtract and all that. It’s one of the most important skills of life.”

The student was asked to describe the characteristics of his favourite teacher and he said:

“I don’t have a favourite teacher. But if I had one - let me see! It would be somebody who ain’t be grumpy when you get inside of the classroom. And would be helpful whenever we need it. And caring, and give the kid more when they don't want to stay, and they don't have to stay.”

The student was asked to talk about his relationship with school administration and he said:

“It was lousy! I’m in so much trouble they didn't want to see me anymore. They get tired of seeing my face. They said, “Forget it we are just shipping him off.”

When the student was asked to talk about his role models he said that he had no role models because no one has been kind to him. He has been influenced by

people on the street and he does not want to be like them. Therefore, he only looks up to himself and God. This is the way he expressed himself:

“I don’t have no role model. I can look up to hardly nobody! Hardly nobody was kind to me. Some people who are outside they influence me - and they are like people who live on the street. So I don’t want to be like them. So I’m staying in school and getting my grades up, passing high school and getting a job. So the person that I could look up to is myself and God.”

The student was asked to talk about his friends and this is what he had to say:

“I have lots of friends. Some of them are nice, some of them are mean. You get along half and half. You always end up with a jerk and you always end up with a nice guy - fifty, fifty. A guy is a nice person and a mean person. When a person is mean I’d just leave them alone. When they’re nice I hang around with them. But if they’re going to be a total jerk, they can just go and do whatever they want. Let’s see! Curtis, a good friend a mine from Barbados – a guy who is always in trouble, but he keeps his act together in school – wants to pass and to get a job and trying to stay out of trouble when he can. I also have some Irish friends because my parents are Irish. Me and my friends - we usually go to La Ronde (an amusement park) and have a blast. Maybe we go to eat pizza, see a movie or something like that. But when it’s cold we stay in the house and play with computer, game boy and regular nintendo. My friends should be somebody to talk to, somebody who is nice and caring. Someone that knows what he is doing, doesn’t want to get anybody else in trouble, and doesn’t drag anybody else down with him.”

The student was asked to describe how most of his friends feel about school and he said:

“The thing is like the saying goes, life is a bitch because my friends don’t want to be in school all day. They want to be outside having fun. Like a bunch of people playing a nice game of soccer, or football or baseball or something like that. Getting them all out of the way. And beating the hell out of each other. They don’t want to be staying in school and sitting down reading and writing and doing Math all that. But they just want me to stay in school, stay out of trouble and most likely to get back home, and stay out of this place. Put my life back together and all that.”

This student indicated that he plans to graduate from high school, joins the work force and earns about \$200 per week. Here is how he tells his story:

“I plan to graduate from high school. I plan to do extra work when I have to. When I see my grade failing I try and pull it up by doing extra time on my homework - and all that. And try and get some help from the teacher like resources and something. Then in the future, most likely, my plans are to go and get a job, get a wife, couple of kids and get on with my life. I want a job - something that I can do and have a fun time at working and have fun time and getting a paycheck - only at job with good paying salary - tops two hundred dollars a week.”

The student was asked to give his views on what schools can do to help students stay in school and not drop out. Here are his remarks:

“There's not much they can do because it's kid's choice if he wants to drop out. Schools can't say, 'You have to stay in, yeah, yeah, yeah!' But if they had different programs and teachers – probably.”

7.14 Student 14

This is a sixteen year old male student. He is presently in Grade 8 and has repeated Grades 4 and 5. He is the youngest of the three children. His mother is Canadian and his father is from Greece. In his home English and Greek were the languages spoken before his parents were divorced. Both parents hold a high school diploma. His father works in maintenance and his mother does not work outside the home. He has lived at five different places in the last five years and changed four schools during the same amount of time. This respondent has previously been placed in a group home, foster home and a residential centre for truancy, running away from home, disobeying his parents and verbal and physical aggression. When this student was asked to describe himself as a person and then as a student he said:

“Like, I'm a good person, jokingly, have a good heart, you know. I'd just won't take what they're saying. If another person like back stab me in the back I won't go crazy and flipping out. It's all right with me. I will talk about it and leave it at that. As a student I'm not bad. I'm all right, but I'm not that good because like

different teachers you know – I find some teachers can help me with – you know – Math. And let's say for instance those teachers at the campus where I was – you know what I mean? Some teachers telling something completely different and some teachers told me to do this and to do that. So basically, I find today that teachers don't know what teaching is or anything. Some people tell you something and some other people tell you something else. So then, I was right then and for the other teachers, I would get it wrong. And then I would do it over and over. Then I would get mad because I had to make corrections all the time and I wasn't sure which teacher was right. It is frustrating!”

The student was asked to talk about what he liked and disliked about the schools he had attended. This is what he had to say:

“I think that school is all right because I'm good at many things like Math and Gym of course. I like English and history. I like everything except French. I like to see my friends in school and learn new stuff every day. And occasionally you know, see girls. But to me, there is too much violence and drugs going around in school. That's because people in school are so dumb they get in trouble and fight for nothing. Most of the schools I've been to there is drugs. The violence, drugs and people that have no respect – they keep on moving when you are talking to them. Some teachers I find have no respect, but some so.”

The student indicated that he has very little interest in being in school at this time because teachers have confused him. Different teachers use different methods to teach Math. So when he was asked about his interest in being in school, he replied:

“Barely none – as I don't see any point in coming here. They tell me this, they tell me that, so what's the point? I'm confused and I get mad.”

The student suggested that he failed two grades because he felt like an outsider in one of the schools he had attended. In order to fit in, he hooked up with students who took drugs. This is how he tells this part of his story:

“I failed Grades 4 and 5 because I moved to this new school. I used to go there you know, and I would never attend. That school is one school that show you no respect. You go there and people just look at you like some kind of retard – teachers and some kids. That school - there some weird people in there! Well, I was an outsider for a little while you know. I was right doing my work, and then after that I

got into groups and drugs and all that. By the time I leave – it just start going there. Now there is no end to it.”

The student was asked to explain what the word success means to him. Here is his explanation:

“Success means to me like – do what you have to do – doing your work, graduating in English, doing your job, do this, do that. Go make a life. Once I had jobs and they were successful to a certain point. I was like eight or nine years old and with my mom. Like I would go around dancing with the other kids – dancing and so forth. So me and couple of my friends would play games and get paid for it. So I can say that I’ve been successful in dancing. And people told me that I should try singing, but I will hold on for now.”

The student stated that the school in which he was exposed to drugs offered him the opportunity to experience success in dancing because it held talent shows. Other schools provided him opportunities to experience success in sports, but he was asked to leave schools because he was not performing academically and his anti-school behaviours were too disruptive.

“At this school - we had like these talent show – so we used to dance a lot in that school. I was able to do my dancing and was successful then. A lot of schools provide sports and the teachers even pushed me to do well. I was very good. But I changed 4 schools and was placed because of my friends, no! All the while I’ll just go to school and sit there and don’t do any work you know! Probably have a fake I.D on me or something. So the school just failed me and stuff like that. And a teacher comes up to me and kicks me out. So I just left and go and don’t give a shit you know! Just left the school and don’t care about it. Don’t even care about it. I just returned and give them the books. That was it. See, I worked successfully without any trouble. I just didn’t want to give more attention and effort to it.”

This student noted that the school curriculum is too narrow. It allows students to demonstrate only a fraction of their talents while other interests are left undeveloped. The student stated that he had opportunities to be successful in dancing and sports, but the schools failed him in other areas. He expressed himself this way:

“They weren’t helpful. They have a lot of teachers who tried to help me, but the schools never did. Because then, I’ll take an example here and let’s move on - and you may understand. I asked a teacher, ‘Miss can you come and help me with this problem?’ And she is like, ‘No, I can’t, it’s a quiz.’ But then I see she is helping everybody else. Then I go, ‘Miss how do you expect me to do your work when I don’t know how to do it?’ She said, ‘O.K, get out of the class – you are not doing any work.’ But I don’t know how to do it. I didn’t say anything and she kicked me out. Why should they kick us out and they want us to come to school and learn? And they are kicking us out and suspending us, and that doesn’t mean anything by it. We are just going to go off and take the day off from school - no matter what we do. If they want us to learn so much, if they keep suspending us, nothing is going to get any better. That’s what I found in schools that I don’t like!”

The student was asked to give his views on how schools can help students to succeed, and he remarked:

“They can’t help us if they kick us out. They should punish us but not take away our school time. I’ve lost a grade and each day they kick us out we are missing a day’s work. Let’s say you know, you have a job and you don’t go to work – you’re missing that day’s pay. When they kick me out they give me the work but I don’t take it. I tell them straight, ‘You want me to learn – I want to learn too. If you want me to learn, you don’t kick me out.’ My staff at the unit – it’s not their job to teach me. It’s the teachers’ job. That’s what they’re there for – that’s what they’re getting paid for.”

The student was asked to talk about how he deals with failure, and he said:

“I don’t deal with it in any way. Sometimes I just chill out and don’t worry. I feel that next term I’ll do good and next year, I’ll do better – just don’t mess up on it. But sometimes it’s hard not to mess up. This may make you laugh, but I put myself on a schedule like I do for gym. If I be kicked out today you know, from school – I can’t see my girlfriend. I can’t smoke and I can’t do this, or I can’t do that. So I have to do my work. Again, if I get kicked out of school I don’t get to go home for my weekend, so I actually have to do my work.”

The student said that although he does not study for exams, he does not mind writing some of them. However, he gets nervous when he has to write some exams because of his uncertainty about the results. Here are his views:

“Some exams are fine. I put all my mind on exams, but I get nervous in a way – not knowing whether I’m gonna pass or do the right thing. I don’t study for exams. I usually don’t think about it until I just quickly sit down. Then I go, ‘Oh shit, exam and great!’ I feel like shit myself. If it’s like Math or English I’ll go in and do them because they are my favourite subjects. I love to write. I love to do

compositions. Most of the time I come up with different stories. I write the math exam because I like doing my times tables and working on shapes.”

When the student was asked to talk about his favourite teacher/s, he replied:

“This person is one of my favourite teachers because she didn’t take her work too seriously. She is good, but she knows how to act and that when you say, “Oh, fuck” - you know jokingly, she will not say, “Get out!” Mostly she would laugh and say, “Hey, watch your swearing!” She would nudge you to remind you not to swear. The other teacher just forces you to do stuff, but she is not too strict. I can’t stand people are strict, I’ll just flip out.”

This student remarked that he has two role models. His role models are an 18 year old friend and a child-care worker. His 18-year-old friend is learning to be a mechanic and the child-care worker is attached to his unit. This is what he said about his role models:

“My friend who is like an older brother and this child-care worker who lives in Montreal – they are my role models. They take care of me and they have good jobs. Because of my friend, I would like to be a mechanic. I think I can do it if I put my mind to it. Since I’ve been in the system for many years, I can relate to child-care workers. So ever since I was little, I wanted to be a child-care worker just like him.”

When the student was asked to talk about his friends, he said:

“I have lots of friends. The friends I have – some of them are not so nice. They do drugs, drink and stuff like that. Some are Greek, some are from the West Indies, and some are Portuguese, but they are all Canadians. When we are together, we just basically do what we want – we go out get high, take drugs in the mall and go see people. They are not perfect, but some of them like school. Some plan to finish school and some will drop out. For me, I like my friends to be honest and respect you for what you do – not just for what you wear or how much money you have, and how much things you have.”

The student added:

“My brother dropped out of school because he was tired of it and was bored with it, but I plan to finish.”

The student's future plan is to graduate from high school – maybe in the Adult Sector. Then he plans to join the work force, but he had difficulty in stating how much money he would like to earn. He said:

“I would like to earn big money – staying in dancing and going through my singing career. I don't know how much money I want to earn. All I know is I want a lot of money – about \$57 per week.”

The student was asked to express his views on what schools can do to help students to stay in school and not drop out. Here are his views:

“Teachers should do their jobs right. When kids raise their hands to ask the teacher for help you don't go, ‘Oh no, you don't need help – you can't, or you just don't want to learn’ – and stuff like that. My brother dropped out of school basically, because they were not there for him. They ignored him when he wanted help. He was always getting kicked out for the most stupidest reason. They didn't like his dress code – all that is not right! I don't think that the school can stop students from dropping out - the way I see it is one single program. That's all! Whether you leave school or not – that's it!”

TABLE 6

Resistance
<p>Resistance theory (Giroux, 1983; McLaren, 1994; Dei et al., 1997) as a contributing factor to dropping out of high school has been advanced by many researchers. Bennett and LeCompte (1995) define resistance (in this context) as a behaviour that takes a conscious, principled and active stand contrary to the dictates of authority figures and social system. Therefore, resistance to institutional constraints is more than simple misbehaviour (Erickson, 1987). As such, it is principled, conscious and ideological nonconformity, which has its basis in philosophical differences between the individual and the institution. It involves “withholding assent” (Erickson, 1987: 237) from authorities. This theory is worth mentioning, as it is another factor that is common to the students in this study.</p>
<p>All the students in this study fall under the rubric of potential dropouts, and for various reasons, all of them have resisted the social and academic norms, expectations and responsibilities that are placed on them. Their resistant might have been the result of their refusal to be silenced and a demand for the right to hold complex opinions or maintain contradictory consciousness (Gramsci, 1971). Some of these students resisted because they disagreed with the way they were being treated for the most part – academically. Although there are other areas of disagreement (e.g., socially and family related), school related problems were</p>

mostly mentioned in this study. Students who are resisters are a problem for the school because they cause trouble and are likely to drop out (Bennett and LeCompte, 1995). They become resisters when their disagreement is actively expressed. These students have expressed their disagreements in a number of ways. In their stories they have talked of being truant, physically and verbally aggressive and abusing drugs as means of defiance or resistance. However, sometimes the resistance only helps secure to an even greater extent the eventual fate of these students (McLaren, 1994).

One of the primary reasons these students are in placement is, they resisted what is expected of them in their family, public schools and society. Students resist classroom instructions for many reasons (McLaren, 1994). Their behaviour is generally seen as “acting-out” (McNeil, 1988a). But Giroux (1983) reminds us that not all acts of students’ misbehaviour are acts of resistance. In fact, such resistance may simply be repressive moments (sexist, racist) inscribed by the dominant culture.

Changing students’ behaviour is one of the major components in all the programs of these schools. One administrator points out that the focus of the program remains on the behavioural choices and the students’ responsibility for making those choices. In his view as the students make progress in effective behavioural management for themselves, they will overcome the shortcomings which prevented their placement in community educational programs (School administrator, 1999). A memorandum from the Department of Professional Services of Batshaw Youth and Family Centres, to administrators of social affairs schools that are under their umbrella, suggested that, “These students need educational and behavioral expectations that are similar to those found in a regular high school” (Paré, 1991). This view appears to subscribe to the notion of “fixing the students and return them to the public school, instead of adjusting the programs in the public schools to the needs of the students (Erickson, 1987; Conner, 1989).

7.15 Student 15

This student is sixteen years old and is in Grade 8. He has repeated Grade 6 and failed Grade 8 last year. He is now repeating Grade 8. He is the third born of the four children in his family. His father has a high school diploma and works as a broker consultant. His mother has a college diploma and is a technician. His parents are divorced. He indicated that his parents do not expect him to graduate from high school, but to join the work force when he leaves school. He has lived in

six different places in the last five years and has changed six schools in the same time. He has previously lived with his aunt for a period of time and has also been placed in a group home and a residential centre. He is now placed in a residential centre for truancy, disobeying his parents, running away from home, physical and verbal aggression and involvement with drugs. When this student was asked to describe himself as a person and a student, he said:

“I would say as a person I’m caring, loving, truthful, honest, sweet and cute of course you know. I would also describe myself as good Joe – your average good Joe I guess! I guess I’m in trouble and all, but I’m here for DYP (Department of Youth Protection). I’m not here because I go and do criminal activities. And yes, I’m here for a little while, but I’m an average person. I’m honest, I’m truthful and I’m caring. I take care of people. I take care of animals and what not. AS a student I’m non motivated, unwilling to learn, I hate school. I hate the fact that I’m forced to come here when I don’t want to be here.”

The student was asked to talk about his likes and dislikes of school. Here is what he said:

“I hate it being here in school. I don’t want to be here like I just said, and it’s boring. The way I see it is – you have to be motivated to be good at something. You’re not going to be a good swimmer if you’re not motivated to jump into the water. The way I see it is – I’m not motivated to do school work, so I’m not going to pass the year. I’m not going to put as much as I could into it, so I’m going to do the bare minimum that I’m supposed to do. I don’t like authority figures thinking that because they are teachers they have all the say in what you do. I don’t like being confined in a building and having to do school work. Because what I want to do later, I’m not going to need it down there. I mean I’m not going to need French in Israel – it’s just something I’m just not going to need. I’m not going to need English necessarily either because I can speak fluently when I’m in Israel. I don’t like writing – I get writer’s cramp. I don’t like having to strengthen my mind on something. I’m not motivated to do it.”

The student was asked to give his view of the meaning of success. Here are his views:

“Well, success is different for everybody. I mean – success for me is achieving the goals that you set out for yourself. It doesn’t necessarily mean win the lottery. You go to the store and a thousand dollars – that’s not success that’s

luck! Success is achieving the goals that you set in front of yourself and then achieving them. Keeping these goals higher and then pushing them a little bit further until you've done everything you could possibly want to do. I mean that's how I would go about getting my success."

Then he added:

"I'm good at basketball. I'm good at baby-sitting. I'm good at watching television, talking on the phone, listening to music and going out with friends. I'm good with a lot of things that teenagers are good at. I'm not good in school - I'm just stuck in it. I don't understand what I'm learning 'cause I barely pass from Grade 7 and now I'm doing Grade 8. I mean it's two years later and I don't know the grade 7 work you know. It's hard for me, but I'm good at other things like riding a bike. Yes, you're talking about success and I have been successful. I have been successful with baby-sitting my nieces and nephews and last summer I got a job as a counselor at a day camp. I'm very good at basketball. I always set goals whenever I play basketball with anyone in the unit. I go out and take a ball and shoot. And if I don't get it, I'll shoot again from the same place, and whenever I get it I move back a step to make my goal harder. And then if I get that - I am successful."

The student indicated that he has not been successful in any of the high schools that he has attended. He said that the only experience he's had with school success is in elementary school. Here is how he tells this part of his story:

"I have not been successful in high school - none of them, except elementary school. But then, I was into school so it wasn't that they had helped me being successful. I wanted to be successful. I've not had opportunities to be successful since I reached high school because I've been in all these alternative schools. I went to an alternative school and you just don't learn there. They are bent on behaviour and not on academics. So I mean - it was a waste of two years. I went in Grade 7 and came out in Grade 8 and I spent two years there - two full years."

When the student was asked if he thought that the schools had failed him, he replied:

"They have halfway failed me. They have tried to help me - but I think some of the times I have pushed them away. I've been - like I didn't want their help. But I'm sure that if they had pushed more like pressing my buttons, they would have gotten me to do my work and comply with what was happening. But it's fifty, fifty. So I wouldn't put all the blame on the schools, but I would blame the school I mentioned before. It's a school and there are six periods a day. And out of the six periods a day, you actually spend two hours on learning something. So in that school, I blame the school 100 percent for my failure. They have failed me."

When the student was asked for his views on what the schools could do to help him succeed, he said:

“I need to learn English and Math. But it’s not what they can help me with, because they do. The teachers do a good job. That’s why they’re teachers – helping kids to pass. Most of the teachers here do a good job, but it’s me that doesn’t want to learn. I don’t want to learn so I’m not going to blame my teachers for something I should blame myself. You see, I don’t even think of the teachers helping me out anymore. In my mind, it still make no difference for I’m not motivated. I would like to learn, maybe later on in my life. I would go to a trade school and learn Mechanics or something like that. Something more educating – because I feel that if I could go there and do that – I’m interested in it so therefore I’ll be motivated to become a mechanic. Therefore I would try harder in school.”

He added:

“I would like to have Auto-shop like we have here. We have Auto-shop, Woodworking, ITT, Metal Work and computer classes. But I’m not talking computer classes – the way how you learn to type. I’m talking the way how you learn to program where you learn everything inside the computer - because here, you learn how to type a poem. But I want to learn how to take the computer apart and put it back together and still have it working at the end – like a computer technician. I also think that schools should have sales management classes. Even I would go because a lot of people leave high school and they don’t go to any more school and go into sales. I know I would do telemarketing. I’m very good at talking so I would sell a lot. If you sell a lot, you make a lot of money. But if you don’t sell, you can’t make money so may be they should give you some kind of business class. I’m not sure what the words are for it, but something like that.”

The student was asked to talk about how he deals with low grades. These are his remarks:

“Low grades don’t really change the way I feel because I know I’m going to get them. I’m looking forward to getting them, I’m not looking forward to getting them – like Oh, I can’t wait to get them to come. I know they’re going to come, but it doesn’t change the way I feel. I’m not taking my exams this year because I spent maybe one month in school. The teachers keep telling me that even if I get a 100 percent on every exam, I can’t pass the year. So right there that blows my year. Imagine me walking into a school for exam? I’ll just make fun of myself. I’ll probably get like 12 percent on Math, if I get that much.”

The student was asked to talk about the characteristics he would like to see in teachers. In responding to this question, the student pointed out that it was

important to him for teachers to have certain characteristics to help him in being successful in school. He also emphasized the importance of small classes as factors that would contribute to school success for him. These are his views:

A teacher should have – number one – a teacher should be able to listen. They should come in here and not think that because they are teachers, they have the power. True, they do - but they should listen to what you have to say. They should answer your questions and not just give you the work and say, ‘Here, go do it!’ They should be nice and be respectful. They should be able to think like we think. They should think – I’m going to say this from my point of view. They should think – these kids are here and they don’t get to go home to their house after school. We do because we are teachers and we aren’t living here. They have to respect us more and understand that we are here for our problems and we can’t – excuse the expression – bust our chops over school right now. One of the major qualities a teacher should have is to be able to chill and to lay back.”

He later added:

“I didn’t spend a lot of time in public schools and when I did I was skipping most of the time. But in public schools, you have teacher – student ratio of 1:25, or 1:30. Here you have a teacher – student ratio of 1:6, 1:7 or 1:8, so it’s very different. In the public schools, the teachers have to do their jobs, learn to calm down and relax. They have to let us go at our own pace and not let us stick with the whole class, because some of us kids can’t go faster. Some of the kids have to go slower. The kids who could go slower need some help, and the kids who could go faster don’t need any help. So leave those kids on the side and don’t help them out with their stuff when they are going ahead. Make deadlines – like we are reading to page 105 today. The kids who stopped at 102 should get the help. The kids who went to 110 don’t need the help. This will help us to go at our own pace.”

When the student was asked to talk about his relationship with school administration, this is what he had to say:

“If you are talking about authority figures, I hate them. I do not like authority. I do not like knowing that somebody is higher up than me who could tell me what to do. I am not 18, so they could still tell me what to do. But I’m 16 going on to 17 – getting closer now to be able to make my own decision, and not having somebody watching over my back. I don’t like principals. I don’t like vice-principals. I don’t like head teachers. I don’t like police and I don’t like anybody in uniform. I just don’t like any body with authority, because one day I was in school – a public high school. I had gotten in a fight in class and the principal kicked me out for defending myself. He suspended me for defending myself. I am allowed to defend myself at whatever cost there is. I should not be punished for

punching a kid back, when he is lacing me with like seven punches in two seconds. If kids are gonna start beating me up, then I'm going to have to fight back to defend myself. I got suspended because of that and I don't think that is right. I didn't instigate it or nothing and I still got suspended – I don't like that! That's when authority gets into power trips, because I was not listened to. And I was not given a chance to explain in the first place. 'You are suspended, pack your bags and get out and take your books!' That's what he told me."

In spite of the student's harsh criticisms of teachers, he indicated that the persons who have been the kindest to him were two of his elementary teachers.

This is what he said:

"Teachers from my elementary school have been the nicest to me, because they had me in after school. Any problems I had, I could go and talk with them and confide in them."

This student has chosen his brother to be his role model. He remarked that his brother has a great influence on him and he would like to be successful as his brother. Here are his views:

"My brother is my role model. He went to Israel at the age of 20. He is now 29. During those nine years he's found himself a wife. He did countless numbers of jobs. He did everything – from border police to under cover narcotics agent. Now he works for the head of security for the US embassy in Israel. He is the number 1 person. I want to be like him. I want to go shooting in a club like he does. And you could use all those wicked types of guns. I'm not 18 yet, so I can't do that."

The student mentioned that he has many friends. When he was asked to talk about them, he said:

"I have many friends so I can't talk about all of them. My friends are the trouble- makers. They are into smoking weed, drinking, fighting, attacking and things like that. They are not good kids. I've got to get rid of all my friends. When I get out of here, I'm dropping all of my friends. I'm going to be lonely for a little while till I can make some new friends who I can actually chill with, and not worry about getting into trouble. Or worry about who is shooting at me and that the bullet can end up in me. Now I have all kinds of friends – White, Black – like a lot of Irish, Jamaicans, Rastafarians and West Indians. My father had a list of people he didn't want me to hang around with – now he calls us the Equal Opportunity Gang. Equal Opportunity because we have Jewish people, Arabian people, Black people and White people. I've known most of these people for most

of my life. Some of them I've known since kindergarten and they don't like school. We don't sit down and have a discussion about it, but I'd say that they don't like it. They get suspended more often than the rest. Many of my friends are in lock up now – about six of them. Me and two of my friends were outside on campus – behind a place smoking some weed when some guy came up and tried to steal one of my friend's rings. So he stabbed the guy and they put him away for like eighteen months to two years for attempted murder.”

The student indicated that he knew many people who had dropped out of high school. Here is one of the stories that he told:

“My mom's boyfriend dropped out of high school. When he dropped out, he was in Grade 11. He went to Edmonton then came back and wanted to return to school, but he didn't. He got a job as a dispatcher in a trucking company and that's what he is doing now. When he was in school he didn't like it. He was not motivated because he was not gaining the marks. He was into weed and all kinds of drugs. So when you get into drugs a lot your marks will drop off.”

In talking about his future plans, the student indicated that he does not intend to graduate from high school. He remarked that in his mind he has already dropped out of school, but he does intend to earn more money than teachers probably make. He also intends to go to Israel, live on the Kibbutz and join the army there. Here are his views:

“I have dropped out of school already. I'm working, but now that I'm here I have to be in school. My position is waiting for me when I get back. I have spoken to boss, and he knows that I'm gonna be a little while getting there. But he is holding the position for me. I'm doing telemarketing. I've been working with the company for about three months prior to coming here. I want to earn a nice amount of money – which is what I'm getting. I mean I probably earn more than some of the teachers are making. That's why I go into telemarketing. Let's put it this way - if you make six sales per week, you clear \$1 000 per week. I will tell you that my pay has gone as low as \$420 to as high as \$1600. So on an average, I'm looking at \$600 to \$700 per week. It is good money! It is good to what some adults make. A kid making \$700 X 52 weeks – a little over 30 grand, \$30 000 per year. But this will be only for a while until I'm 18. When I'm 18 I'm going to move to Israel and I'm going to live on a Kibbutz and I'm going to join the army. I'm going to get a job in Israel because I have connections with the American Consulate and the FBI because of my brother. I could get a job doing something and I will move up, up and up. But I'm going to be successful! My grandfather didn't even finish high school and for 40 years of his life he was the executive vice-president for Place

Bonaventure – amazing! So I’m hoping to wing something up. That’s what I’m hoping for.”

When the student was asked to give his views on what schools can do to prevent students from dropping out, he replied:

“They could make schools fun. They could make it funnier. If you make schools more fun – make it more up beat, maybe put some music on in class - kids will listen. When teachers are respecting the needs of their students they will pass. I’m telling you, if you make school funnier it will work. I’m saying – not making school easier, but put it into different perspective so that it’s fun – at least they think it’s fun.”

7.16 Student 16

This student is seventeen years old. He is working on a Grade 10/11 program. He is repeating some Grade 10 courses and working on some Grade 11 courses. He is the younger of the two children in his family. He has an Irish mother and Canadian father who are divorced. His mother has a college diploma and works as a social worker in Vancouver. His father has a high school diploma and is incarcerated now. This student is placed for being in trouble with the law. The student described himself as a person and a student the following way:

“Well, these last few months since I’ve been up here, I’ve been doing a lot of thinking in terms of myself. I guess you say that I kinda started my journey in soul searching – I started thinking seriously about my life situation in terms of doing the right thing and being honest. I was never serious you know. I guess this was like a wake up call because I’m 17 now and I’m going to 18 in December and I have been getting in trouble with the law and what not. And now I see myself – I notice a lot of patterns like bad habits. I tend to be manipulative. I can be cruel sometimes, but on the other side I’m also a nice person. I have like compassion for a lot of people, life and what not you know. And I’m trying to stay positive at these times. I remember last year this time, I was really sending a negative vibe. I don’t know – I guess I wanted not to give a crap about too much and kinda like duct with the easy way out, and try and say I didn’t care about anything. Now I’m trying to pay attention to – in terms of how I feel and letting people know. I find I can breathe deeper if I get things off my chest these days. As a student – before this year I was one of those people who was lucky in terms of getting by you know. In high school I would always get by

with 60's and 70's or whatever, without ever studying or putting in the effort. I was lucky! But once I started more difficult work in Grade 10, it was time to put in more effort. I was not used to it so I dropped out last year and decided to get a job and I did. I learned the hard way and I wanted to go back to school this year. But this year, I realized that I was doing it for myself – like I wanted to finish. I didn't want to go because everybody else thought I had to and expected me to. Because that's what it's about in life you know. I was expected to go to school and that's why I wasn't really into it. I didn't really understand that it was for me although everybody else told me so."

The student was asked to give his views about school – what were his likes and dislikes. These are his views:

"This year was the first time I really wanted to do it because I know that it's for me. I knew that I need my high school diploma to go anywhere you know. And I have the option if I want to continue in further schooling later on in life you know. I don't know what my plans are for next year, but this year I know that I have to finish what I have to do. I never really liked that it was something I had to do, because some one else said so. I didn't like the fact that it was expected of me by everybody – to conform to these rules and learn what this person at the head of the class is telling me. Because other people said so, I didn't like it. I also didn't like school because I used to question – I used to say, 'Why am I doing this?' I'm not getting any reward you know. People work and they get paid, but I'm not getting paid you know. And they would say, 'Oh, you'll see it. You'll feel good if you're doing good.' And I just thought that was something that they said to motivate me. I just thought it was a bunch of crap, so I just went through with my ideas. But this year, now that I'm doing good - I'm getting good marks and stuff like that. I'm putting in effort and it does feel good you know. I guess I could say that I'm proud of myself for doing that this year."

When the student was asked how much interest he had in being in school now, he said:

"Well, I have to maintain enough to stay focus and do what I have to do. Sometimes it's a little bit discouraging when you're working on something that you're not interested in personally. But that's the way it goes."

The student was asked to talk about what he views success to be. Here is his reply:

"It depends on the context. I think success for me would be to be comfortable financially in life, but also like emotionally you know - like comfortable with yourself and healthy. Of course, there is always going to be baggage in whatever life situation that you're in, but success to me is to be able to

comfortable and happy. I'm sure there is always struggle, but not having to struggle too much – not having to worry about if your kids are gonna be eating, or your electricity is gonna be cut off.”

The student was asked to give his views on what schools can do to help students to be successful. He suggested that it is important that children be made to understand at an early age the reason for their going to school. When children have a clear understanding that they go to school for their own benefit, it may reduce their resistance towards school and manipulation in school. This is the student's explanation:

“You know, when a teacher comes around and ask why I'm not working, I would just manipulate and say, ‘I was just waiting for you to explain it to me.’ But if a teacher sees that a kid is not really into doing work, maybe the teacher won't be as keen to help that kid out, as opposed to some one who is really trying. I think though, maybe there could be another way. That is – trying to explain to us at a really early age and really imply that it is for us.”

The student stated that his favourite courses in school are History, Auto-mechanics and Wood shop. In talking about his favourite courses, he said:

“I like history a lot. I like to talk about world issues – that's interesting. I also like Auto courses. Something that is physical you know. Manual labour like woodworking - although sometimes I get frustrated.”

The student describes the qualities that he admires in a teacher this way:

“I like a teacher who is able to joke around a little bit and not always serious, and makes it a comfortable place to sit in the class – instead of coming and like if you laugh at something then you're gonna get in trouble. That kind of stuff is not right. I think people are more inclined to be comfortable in a place if they can feel that it's all right to smile you know.”

When the student was asked to talk about his relationship with school administration, he said:

“Before this year, it was always like they are running me in - they are always trying to get me. Even though – like probably, most of the time they were trying to help me – give or take a few exceptions. I felt that maybe they didn't like me, or something. I was never really in to school, and then like I spent so much time getting

suspended, and kicked out of school and switch from here to there – that they just kinda pushed me through the door you know. But this year, I find now administration is really helpful. Whenever I have a question, I will just ask and I will get help with whatever I need.”

This student has chosen his mother to be his role model. This is what he had to say about his mother:

“Well, I have my mother who has always been my role model for just doing the right thing. I guess that’s what she always said you know. I admire my mother for how much strength she has. Because I remember when she was in college and getting her degree for social work, it was like really a hard point in her life. I was younger so I didn’t know all the circumstances, but now I know what she had to go through and the amount of stress that she had to deal with. I guess it wasn’t healthy at the time, but she was able to push it aside and do what she had to do. She had no choice – she had to raise me and my sister, pay the bills and make sure that there was food on the table, clothes on our back, and that we were in school. She was waitressing throughout the time she was in school, so it was a lot of work for her. But she never broke down completely you know. I saw her cry a couple of times, but I’m sure she did a lot more than what I saw. She did it, but she maintained herself. She always was very strong. I know sometimes like I would think of her if I’m doing something you know. Not to really compare situations, but just to motivate myself in terms of how she was able to do that – so you know, if I put myself to this, then I could get through it too. I didn’t really have a male role model when I was growing up. I had my uncles and stuff like that and older cousins, but not all of them were good role models so I stuck to my mother.”

The student was asked to talk about his friends and this is what he had to say:

“I had a lot more friends before I came here. A lot of them I thought were good friends and stuff, because I’d grown up with them all my life. But it turned out that they weren’t really good friends. I only have a few real good friends now. It used to be that I would surround myself with people who have similar difficulties in life. We did not have interests because a lot of things we did were negative. There was a large variety of people because I never really had one set or group of friends you know. Most of my friends were from the same area I grew up in. In NDG, and you know it is not a very rich area – people struggling for money and stuff like that.”

The student remarked that at the end of this school year he would be missing 14 credits to graduate. He will be 18 years old in December, and therefore is allowed to return to a public school for the fall term of the next school year.

However, he has chosen not to return to a public school, but to complete his high school credits in the adult sector. These are his views:

“Next September, I can go back and finish the 14 credits, but I don’t really want to go to a high school. I don’t wanna be with peers my own age. I don’t wanna get caught up in the same bull crap I was caught up in before. I’d rather be – like say in an adult ed. place where the majority of people are there because they want to get done with what they are doing, instead of joking around.”

Unfortunately the rest of this interview was lost because of some disruption that took place during the tape recording.

7.17 Student 17

This student is 15 years old. He repeated Grade 7 and is now in Grade 9. He has three siblings and he is the second of the four children. His parents are from the West Indies. His mother has a college diploma and works as a child-care worker. His father is a recording artist in the Caribbean, but the respondent does not know his father’s level of education. The respondent indicated that his parents were divorced when he was very young, so he does not know his father. He lives with his mother and stepfather, but does not plan to return home after his discharge from this residential centre. He plans to move into a group home. He has lived in two different homes in the last five years and has changed two schools in the same amount of time. He had previously been placed in a group home and a residential centre for disobeying his mother and for being verbally and physically aggressive.

When this student was asked to describe himself as a person and then as a student, this is what he had to say:

“I would say that I’m a pretty good person. Not every kid’s perfect or whatever, but I’d say that I’m a very good kid. I respect people you know. I do my

little teasing once in a while, but all in all I respect people, do good things and help people and stuff like that. Well as student, my grades are good whenever I study a lot and try hard to get high marks.”

The student was asked to give his views about his likes and dislikes of school. These are his views:

“I would say that school here is fine. If you do your work, you have free time and stuff like that. It’s pretty good. I don’t know really dislike anything about school. I mean there are days when it’s rough – like the teacher giving you a lot of homework and you’re tired. Some days you come into school tired and you don’t feel like doing that much work, but like the teachers are pushing for you to do work. That can be rough.”

The student was asked to explain what he understood by the word success. This is his explanation:

“Success is like being all you can be. It’s like reaching the top of your goal – just doing what you want to do. Let’s say, for instance Michael Jordon – when he was young he went to school. He had a rough time, but he worked hard in basketball to be in the NBA. I’m successful because I’m good at sports, good in school, good at singing rap. I have a rap group. I have been successful at all those three things.”

He added:

“In sports, I started playing soccer when I was young – about five years old. I got a lot of help from stepfather. He sometimes would help me out and everything. After that, I had much more interest so I joined a team for about three years. Then after that, I started going to high school and a lot of friends there played basketball. So I started playing basketball and I got good at it.”

The student suggested that schools have programs that are geared towards all students achieving success. However, it is the students’ responsibility to avail themselves of the opportunities that exist. Here is what he said:

I think that schools and teachers and stuff try and help you. They do the best they can, but I think most of it is what you are doing to help yourself. Schools offer opportunities with their good sports program and stuff like that. They have work programs for you to study and things like that. My schoolwork was going well and everything. Everything was going well in school, but it’s just like sometimes my friends wouldn’t want to go to school so he’d skip and everything and I would go with him. I was kicked out of school also, because I had problems in the city, causing

trouble in the community, running away and stuff like. But my schoolwork was good.”

The student was asked to talk about how he deals with exam, and he replied:

“I remember when I was Grade 7 and we had exams. Like the exam was very long and everything. The questions were pretty easy, but when it started to get hard you got frustrated and skip a whole bunch of questions. And then you don’t feel like doing it anymore, so you just leave it at that. If it is long and everything, I don’t mind doing it but then there’s questions that you forget or something like that. And then it’s too hard to think about it. You just forget about and that’s how you lose marks.”

When the student was asked to describe how he finds learning in school, he said:

“Learning is kinda boring sometimes. You just sitting in class and watching the teacher explaining everything. Like come on, let’s get on with the work. Like doing exams and stuff like the – sometimes they spend an hour just explaining the exam and half the time we already know what to do. It’s just boring!”

The student indicated that he does not have a favourite subject, “but if I had one it would be easy and fun,” he went on to say:

“Sometimes, even the hard stuff is pretty fun too because it makes you think. Algebra is pretty fun because it’s very complicated. It’s like a guessing game you know. You have to know the numbers and subtract it and things like that.”

The student remarked that he does not usually speak with school administrators, but he does so if he has a complaint to make. He also indicated that he does not favour any teacher, but he likes one teacher at this school more than the others. Here is what he had to say about that teacher:

“I don’t have a favourite teacher, but actually there is a teacher in this school – he’s pretty cool. Sometimes like if we finish our work, he gives us a break you know to play on the computer. He brings in candies and goodies for us and stuff like that. I like that kind of stuff.”

When the student was asked to talk about the person who has been kindest to him, he said:

“Probably my gym teacher – like he’s cool. Not in this school, but in my old school if there is a problem or something he could understand where you are coming from – rather than the other teachers. You talk to them and they would be like, ‘Oh well, that’s not the way to do this and that.’”

The student emulates Michael Jordon and has selected him to be one of his role models. He is hoping to be an excellent basketball player some day like Michael Jordon. He is also hoping that some time in the future he will be able to play basketball in the NBA. The student has also selected some rap singers to be his role models because in his view, “They sing about what is happening in life and the changes they would like to see take place in society.” The student said that he has a rap group. Here is what he had to say about his rap group:

“Well, like my rap group that we have now – everything is pretty cool. We had a couple of shows and things like that, and we are starting to get paid. We are going to the studios and singing and making tapes, so I think that’s gonna be good.”

The student remarked that he has many friends. His friends are from the West Indies. Their favourite past time is smoking weed. They also spend time partying and drinking. Some of his friends have dropped out of school and some are in placement. Here the student tells two stories – one about his friend who has dropped out of school, and the other about his friend who is in placement:

“Well, my friend was going to school. After that he had problems at home and stuff like that. And then he came to us and started hanging around us. And he started skipping school because when we are together we have a lot of fun, so he didn’t want to miss out on the fun and go to school. So we all just skipped like that until he dropped out. He didn’t want to be in school any more, he had too much problems at home.

Some of my friends who were skipping are now in placement too. Actually some of them that were doing the singing are in placement now. One of my friends – he is in Cité now and he broke his probation. He is supposed to be in for nine

O'clock and he stayed out later than that robbing cars and stuff like that. Cité is a juvenile jail, but it's one stop away from big jail."

In talking about his future plans, this student suggested that he wishes to graduate from high school and then go to college. While in college, he wants to get a scholarship to play basketball. He is hoping to be drafted to play in the NBA where he will earn \$1.5 million per year. He said, "On top of \$1.5 million, if you are a really good player, your pay raises." Now that most of the members of his rap group are in placement, singing rap might not be a factor in his future plans.

The student was asked for his views about what schools can do to stop students from dropping out, and he said:

"I guess it's like too much pressure. Like the teachers are pressuring the kids to do more work than the kids are able to do and stuff like that. They should just let the kids take it a little bit at a time – let the kid get used to the work you know. Sometimes kids come to school and they are tired – they don't feel like doing much work. The teacher should say, "All right do a little today, but tomorrow you will have to catch up." But teachers spend a lot of time pressuring the kids to do work, so they get fed up and leave and they don't want to come back."

7.18 Student 18

This student is 15 years old. He repeated Grade 7, but he failed that grade twice. He is now a Grade 8 student. He has two siblings and he is the youngest of the three children in the family. His father is from Ecuador and his mother is Canadian. English, Spanish and French are the languages spoken in his home. His mother has a high school diploma and works as a secretary. He does not know his father's level of education but stated, "Not a lot." The student stated that his father works in the Department of Immigration, but he is unaware of the type of work his father does. He has lived in the same house for the last five years, but he has

changed five schools in five years. He has previously been placed in a group home and a residential centre. He is placed for his verbal and physical aggression and disobeying his parents. When this student was asked to describe himself as a person and then as a student, he said:

“As a person – I don’t know what to say. I’m a normal person, I guess. I’m normal – not abnormal, but just look where I live! As a student, I’m all right. I get good enough marks.”

The student was asked to talk about his likes and dislikes of school. These are his remarks:

“I go to school all the time so I can become something in life. I don’t like everything about school. I don’t like sitting in a class all day – it’s gets me mad. I don’t like it! I’m a smoker and you have sit down and do nothing for three hours. No, I don’t like it – I hate everything about school. I hate school. My only interest in school is just to pass so I can do something with my life.”

When the student was asked to give his views on the meaning of success, he replied:

“Success is an accomplishment. You accomplishment something – it goes in your favour. That’s what success does. A successful person shows a happy face, wears nice clothes and lives in a nice house.”

The student indicated that school could help him to achieve the type of success he mentioned because:

“When you finish high school, you go to CEGEP and then go to university. Then maybe you get a good job. So school will help me to be successful.”

He added:

“In the past I failed. I failed Grade 7, two times. But the school could not have helped me because I didn’t want it. I will succeed when teachers do what they have to do and I do what I have to do.”

How do you find learning in school? To this question, the respondent replied:

“Learning is usually hard. Sometimes I get good help from the teacher, but sometimes there is just nobody to help you. Sometimes in the unit, the staff don’t understand the homework and stuff so they can’t help you.”

The student was asked to describe his feelings when he receives low marks in school. Here is his description:

“When I get low marks I get mad. It depends on where I am – I could swear, I could just beat my head, I could scream or I could just throw something. But now I get high grades most of the time.”

The student indicated that English and Auto-mechanics are his favourite courses. However, he gets nervous when he has to write an English exam. Then he remarked that he had two teachers whom he favours. One person is a teacher in an alternative school outside the social affairs domain. The other person teaches on one of the campuses of the social affairs schools. Here is his description of one of the teachers whom he favours:

“This teacher is a smart guy. He used to give me the real truth – no bullshit, always the real truth – the hard truth. He never played games with your head. He was always nice to me. He talked to me so I could understand, and I appreciated that. Even though he was funny, he was everything. I don’t really like school, but I’ve come across a few good teachers.”

Then he added:

“But the kindest person to me was not a teacher. She is a child-care worker. She’s been following me for a while. I see that she cares because she takes time to sit down and try and give you advice. I have a meeting with her tonight.”

This student stated that Jesus Christ was his role model. He has also chosen the members of a music group called Marilyn Manson to be his role models. He

indicated that although he idolizes the lead singer in that music group he prefers Jesus as a role model. Here is his description of his role models:

“If Jesus Christ was who they said he was, then he was the perfect person you know. I mean, Jesus Christ – look at his teachings! Look at everything he did – it makes sense. Jesus was a perfectionist. He was the perfect person - he had no sins. Everything he does he goes to the limit. I don’t know man, when you read in the Bible – the only thing that he ever did that was close to one of us, was to go to the temple without permission. He just ran up to the temple and came out. I mean, when you were young did you get in trouble if you went into a church? No, Not really, you won’t get into trouble.

From the group, I respect every single one of those people. I don’t know what it is man – I just like the way they stand. They are kinda cool! They don’t showoff. They don’t show off their money like all the other people. They don’t talk all kind of crap either. But although these people are my role models, it’s hard to be like them. It’s hard to be like Jesus Christ because of what he did. He performed miracles and he had no sins. The others, they make music and it’s hard for me I guess.”

When the student was asked to talk about his friends, he said that he knew many people but he would not call them all friends. He stated that his friends are from Mexico, Puerto Rico, West Indies and Italy. Here is what he had to say about his friends:

“I have Mexican friends, Puerto Rican friends, West Indian friends and I have some Italian friends. I know some Greeks, but I don’t have any Greek friends. When we hang out together, we just have a good time going to the movies and smoking. My friends don’t like school very much I would think. Some of them don’t want to go to school. Some of them have dropped out already because school is hard for them. One friend dropped out of school because, basically he didn’t have an easy life. This person had got into a lot of trouble. Doing schoolwork was hard for him, so he just dropped out. I also have friends in placement. O.K, I’ll tell you a quick story! My friend went to a school. He was smoking a joint outside, and some guy ran inside and told on him. They said that he was smoking a joint outside. The person broke the other person’s leg. He broke his angle. The other guy couldn’t even walk – he was crying. They called the police and my friend got arrested. So that’s why that friend was put in placement.”

When the student was asked to talk about his plans for the future, he said:

“I’d better have a plan for the future because I would never be on welfare – never! I want to earn good money so I could live somewhere nice, eat well, do as I

please and not have to buy clothes only once a year or something. I want to live on a respectable budget. I want to live somewhere nice like in RDP.”

The student was asked to give his views on what schools could do to stop student from dropping out. Here are his remarks:

“Schools can offer them special programs with varied classes, so you can get your mind off things. You can go to the Gym and have one special class a day. You could split up that special class into half in the morning and half in the afternoon. Sometimes in the afternoon you can be allowed to bring in your walkman. That’s what I did this afternoon. I brought in a tape and the teacher gave me some earphones so I just did my Math. That’s the only way I can do it, or else when I’m in a class all I do is turn around and talk to somebody. And you see that is the only class that has helped me. So that’s what we need in Quebec – we need special classes for Math, special classes for English and special classes for French. They should also get some younger teachers who can relate to us. The older teachers try to set example and make Einstein out of us, but they get told off and people are cursing them. Everyday they get told to fuck off. So they should get teachers who can relate to youngsters like us.”

TABLE 7

The impact of families on students’ schooling

All the students in this study came from broken homes. The administrator of one of the schools spoke of the family breakdown as one of the major experiences that was common to all the students in that school. The administrator (1990) said:

“As far as these kids here, I think there are not so many differences as there are similarities – in that they are here partially because they’ve had a family breakdown. Somewhere, their family life isn’t working. So it doesn’t matter if they are coming from Ormstown, or if they are coming from the Black Community in Montreal – they have a common component, and that is family breakdown.”

Unfortunately for students like the ones in this study, public schools in a postmodern society continue to operate in a modern mode with regards to the students’ families (A Statistical Look at Montreal Families, 1994). These schools still operate as if most students live with two heterosexual parents, one of whom is a full time parent at home to help with homework and school activities, while the other parent works outside the home as the bread-winner (Bennett and LeCompte, 1995). The present reality has suggested that such a situation has become the exception and no longer the norm (Statistics Canada, 2001), for a family in Quebec is now identified as two parents, single parent, blended broken, heterosexual, etc. Less than half the population in Quebec are married. Therefore, there are more

widowed, single, divorced and separated people in Quebec (*A Statistical Look at Montreal Families, 1994*) than in the rest of Canada. Divorce is on the increase in Quebec and so is single parenting (Statistics Canada, 2001). These are factors that impact negatively on the school life of students. The students are frequently caught between the expectations of schools and their family life (McLaren, 1994).

Added to the emotional stress of dealing with the separation of parents and various family dysfunctions, students who live with single parents are often left alone at home with no adult to care for them after school. They are usually left unsupervised, without proper provisions for proper meals, or help with homework (O'Neill and Sepielli, 1985). Single parents usually have to work long and irregular hours. Schools have not acknowledged the new parental structure and constraints, consequently they have failed to adjust their schedules and timetable to facilitate such a reality. However, the schools, members of the general public and their parents expect students to be emotionally matured and to demonstrate adult-like independent behaviours (Woodhouse, 1987) while they are on their own. When students are left unprotected and unsupervised because of family breakdown (or any other reason), they are usually lured into participating in illegal activities such as the use of drugs, alcohol and prostitution (Bennett and LeCompte, 1995). O'Neill and Sepielli (1985) in their famous "latchkey" reference to unsupervised children demonstrated the difficulties that these students endure. With the odds so highly stacked against these students, it is no wonder that they find themselves in situations where they become wards of the court and are at such high risk of dropping out of school.

Although the students' experiences are similar for the most part, there are segments of their life that are unique to each one. This allows for their individuality, hence the need to hear each story. At the same time, it is important to take into consideration the collective views of the students in the analysis. While Chapter 7 emphasized the students' individual voices through their stories, the following chapter interprets and analyses the collective views of the students in this study. As such, the collective thoughts, views and personal experiences are discussed within the framework of a combination of the major educational theories.

CHAPTER 8

INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS (PART 2)

This chapter serves as an account of individual student's perceptions and experiences. Central to this analysis is the collective views of the students. Although each student's life is unique, the analysis reveals similar experiences, thoughts, feelings and personal meanings among them. From this study a number of factors relating to students who are at risk of dropping out of high school emerged. Some factors that were already examined by previous researchers were confirmed. For example, Anyon's (1990) notion of students blaming themselves for failure in school emerged as one of these factors. A number of factors associated with the likelihood that these students may leave school prematurely also emerged. These factors include family structure, repeated school failures, truancy, changing schools frequently, parents' education and occupation, students' relationship with teachers and the curriculum. These factors are discussed in some detail. The analysis is constructed thematically. Themes and categories within themes emerged during the process of the analysis. For example, "How students perceive themselves" emerged as a theme, while "violence" and "students' view of success" are categories within that theme. Some interview passages are inserted to identify the student (e.g., Student 4, will be identified as S - 4).

8.1 HOW STUDENTS PERCEIVE THEMSELVES: NEGATIVE SELF AND POSITIVE SELF

Most of the students viewed themselves as troublemakers in school and in the community. One student said, “I’m somebody who likes getting into trouble a lot” (S –9). While another said, “I am not exactly a kind person because I get into a lot of fights” (S – 11). Some students dislike, even resent authority figures. They stated that they are truants, they drink alcohol and use illegal drugs. “We are all troublemakers – you could get into smoking weed, fighting and attacking” (S – 15). Despite the negative light in which they portrayed themselves, they suggested that they are also kind and caring human beings. For example, one student remarked, “I’ve been manipulative. I can be cruel, but on the other side I’m also a nice person and I have compassion for a lot of people” (S – 16). Another student described himself as a good person, truthful, honest and caring. “I take care of people, animals and things” (S – 1). “I would say as a person I’m caring, loving, truthful, honest, sweet and cute of course you know. As a person, I would also describe myself as good Joe – your average good Joe I guess!” (S – 15).

The students have cited truancy, frequent school suspensions, changing schools frequently, inability to work at the expected pace and, or family problems as reasons for their school failure. “I really wasn’t into school. I spent so much time getting suspended and kicked out” (S – 16). Although they do not like school, most of them stated they want to be in school. But they would only stay if there were a more relaxed school environment in public schools than the ones that are presently displayed.

They indicated that for the most part they do not like school. They find school to be boring and not a fun place. Academically, they suggested that they have not been successful in the public schools that they have attended. “I’m a very below average student. I guess I’m not smart at all in school. The Math is horrible. I know I’m going to fail! I’ve failed it once and then I’m going to fail it again” (S – 8).

8.1.1 Violence

It is difficult to address the issue of violence and omit the impact of abuse on individuals. Although abuse is mentioned here, it deserves its own space so it is discussed further on in another section of this of this chapter.

In their study of school dropouts, Beauvais, Chevez and Oetting (1996) support the notion that students at risk are often involved with the use of drugs and the perpetration of violence. The stories the students told and their description of themselves validate the findings of Beauvais and his colleagues (1996) and reports by school administrators, social workers and teachers in this study (1999) and *Canada and the World* (1996). The students and their friends use drugs and carry guns and knives on them. For aggressive and non-compliant behaviours students bear the blunt of their parents’ displeasure and the intolerance of the school and the general public. They are usually seen as drug addicts, who have behavioural problems or who commit crimes in order to support their habits (Ruffo, 1996). Students (young offenders) who commit violent acts in schools, in their homes and in the community, are usually suspended from school. One-fourth of all suspensions from school nationally was for violent incidents (National School

Board Association, 1993:3) or transferred to another school (students in the study, 1999; School administrator, 1999). Furthermore, they are likely to become wards of the court and may be put in placement, as are the students in the study. The National School Board Association (1993) points out that one out of five weapons arrests in 1991 was a juvenile arrest.

For the most part, students are blamed for their aggressive and violent behaviours and are generally cast off as criminal elements in society (McLaren, 1998; Ruffo, 1996). These students are products of their environment and as such Ruffo (1996), a youth court judge argues that treatment and prevention are needed to help these students instead of punishment. Ruffo (1996) is appalled at what she perceived to be a double standard in society between the way youth in need of help and adults who need help are treated. She said:

When an adult suffers from addiction, society considers that person to be ill and provides support. However, there are no detoxification centres for children who are addicted to drugs in Quebec. Rather society looks on them as delinquents who must be rehabilitated. Then there are the runaways, the children who are shuffled from institution to institution and end up on the streets, more than not, hooked on drugs. There are the suicidal children, and the delinquents who manifest their anger by committing crimes to tell a society that they will not listen how angry they are. First and foremost, we must listen to the anger these children are expressing, share their pain and develop new social bonds based on different values: solidarity, understanding, mutual aid and love. But to help these children grow, to foster learning. (p.7)

In the stories, the students did not only speak of their involvement with the use of illegal drugs and their violent behaviours, but they also spoke of the abuse inflicted on them and their victimization by violence. As well, Beauvais, Chevez and Oetting (1996) and Ruffo (1996) have pointed out that these students are also victims of the society and in some instances they are victims of their parents,

family members or friends of their parents (*Canada and the World*, 1996). Data compiled by the Canadian Justice Department showed that an average of 54 children, most of them under five years old were murdered each year throughout the 1980s. One-third of these children were murdered by their mothers, one-third were murdered by their fathers, while a quarter of them were murdered by people whom they knew, or friends of their parents (Reported in Statistics Canada, 1991). Those who escaped with their lives are usually damaged either emotionally, physically, mentally or socially. Sometimes students are afflicted with all or any combination of the afore mentioned problems (Lessard, 1987).

Owing to the students' experiences and personal location, many of them have immediate personal and global survival on their minds. As well as being abused (physically, sexually and emotionally), they witness people they know being abused, and their own parents abuse each other (Bennett and LeCompte, 1995). Although they are school and public offenders, they do experience a tremendous amount of suffering (Ruffo, 1996). Ruffo (1996) describes some of their suffering this way: "Children who suffer are the ones who become prostitutes, who are convinced that they are nothing but objects and who suffer immeasurably because they must go through these humiliations" (p. 7). The problem of students at risk of dropping out of high school looms large as they are scarred. As mentioned in the evolution of education in Canada, society has a major impact on the effects of schooling. Since this society is part of the problem, it has to be involved in the solution to effect change in favour of these students.

As has been argued throughout this thesis, the issue of high school dropout is a complex one. In cases of young offenders (as the students in this study are labeled) some experts suggest that besides family breakdown and poor parenting, popular culture such as violence filled movies, television and songs that advocate violence contribute to students violent behaviours (Giroux, 1994, 1996; McLaren, 1998; Ruffo, 1996). Giroux (1994) and McLaren (1994) and other critical thinkers have expressed concerns about educating students such as these whom they feel are marginalized. They are critical about educating postmodern students in our present modern schools (with modern moral views and expectations). They have also expressed concern regarding the popular culture and its influence on education. For example, five students in this study indicated that their role models are popular entertainers. One student chose Michael Jackson as his role model; another chose the members of the Marilyn Manson band; one chose Jim Carrey; one liked rap singers and the other chose actors such as: Robert De Niro, Marlon Brando and Jack Nicholson. These students emulate their chosen entertainers and expressed their desire to be like them. Student 8 said: "I like making films so I'm often enchanted with movie actors like Robert De Niro, Marlon Brando and Jack Nicholson. I know that Marlon Brando wouldn't be a good role model...but I copy the characteristics that they (actors) portray – like gestures, mannerisms and the way they walk."

Giroux speaks of popular culture as "an educational tool" that influences the minds of students in this postmodern era. Specifically, he illustrates that films perform a pedagogical function in providing a certain kind of language to convey

and understand violence. This compounds the problem of what students learn and the application of what they learn as popular culture reflect and shape public culture. Popular culture confuses students who are required to accept an education system with modern ideas of rationality, discovery and success, but at the same time that system subverts cultural individuality through its over-indulgence in big entertainment industries or as Giroux describes it, “late capitalism and bourgeois cohesion” (1994). Therefore, big industries within the entertainment milieu cannot define their work solely on the notion of artistic freedom, but should take some responsibility for the violence that some students admire, emulate and practice.

8.1.2 Students’ view of success

In analyzing the students’ perception of success, three factors emerged.

- ◆ *The students perceived school success as a personal achievement, which can be used to elevate their self-esteem.*
- ◆ *From a sociological aspect, they accept the functionalist view of school success as the provider of upward mobility.*
- ◆ *Students want to succeed in school, but they need suitable conditions and support to be able to accomplish this task. Critical theorists and proponents of conflict theory underscore the need for suitable conditions in public schools – if students are to be successful. The students’ view is that success is incremental and should be recognized as such in schools.*

One student remarked that although success is different for every-body, “For me, success is achieving the goal that you set for yourself” (S – 15). “Success is a personal fulfillment that a person has” (S - 7). These students’ definition of success reflects most of those who were interviewed. The opinion of school success that some students gave is consistent with the view of the adults who were interviewed in this project. These students perceive school success as completing the high school program and graduating with a diploma. One student said, “I want to be in school to get marks and then graduate and achieve my goal. If I don’t come to school, I’ll never get passed it. It’s part of being successful. Part of being successful is achieving your goal.”

“Well, if you are like a good student you finished high school and you go to college or university, you want success – like succeed. If you are studying for – to be in politics and you succeed - you end up in politics and that’s your success. You want to be in politics and you go to school to train to go to politics for that and then you might end up in politics like your dream. If you want to do (work at) it. That’s what I think about success. Well, me! I think I’m successful in sports. I’m good in basketball. That’s why I want to go to college to be in a college basketball team so I could play on it and with the NBA. That’s my dream – to go to the NBA Basketball - Pro basketball” (S – 11).

The students appear to have accepted the functionalist view of school success – that it is a passport to upward economical and social mobility. “Some people who are outside, they are like people who live on the street. I don’t want to be like them, so I’m staying in school and getting my grades up – passing high school and getting a job” (S – 13). “ ... I want to go somewhere in life. I don’t want to be like a bum on the street, where you can’t do anything – begging for money. I probably want to have my own family and everything” (S – 1).

The students also expressed the notion that it is important to be successful in high school because failure to receive a high school diploma could lead to a life of living on social assistance and poverty.

From the interpretive point of view, the students' perception of the relationship between schooling and the labour market are derived from their interpretation of the world around them (Willis, 1977). In this case, the students' perspectives are interpretations of the functionalist view - that success in school is rewarded with a good job and a good life later. These perspectives assist the students in defining society's expectations of them. Conversely, by defining their realities they locate themselves in society. My perception therefore, is that most of the students dreaded the thought of leaving high school without a diploma. They appeared to have attached great importance to graduating from high school with a diploma. The financial, social and psychological benefits of having a diploma were very well articulated. "I have lots of interest in school now. I want to finish my high school so I can go to college – get a degree in something I'm good at, so I can get a good job" (S – 10). "I'd better have a plan for the future, because I would never be on welfare – never" (S – 18). There appears to be a type of fear that exists among these students regarding being on social welfare. This may be caused by the social stigma attached to the welfare system in Quebec. Unlike Newfoundland where receiving social assistance is socially acceptable and education is not generally seen as necessary for financial stability, in Quebec social assistance is frowned on and receiving a high school diploma is regarded as the key to success (Statistics Canada, 1990).

Throughout this thesis I have emphasized the importance of listening to students' voices. For in listening to what the students actually say in their stories and the reality of their meanings and perceptions of the functionalist model of achievement in school is far more complex than what emerges on the surface. In the above discussion, the students appear to have "internalized" the functionalist view of the merits of hard work in school. However, they have also perceived cracks in the view that are likely to be emphasized as significant by conflict, critical and interpretive theorists. Like the conflict, critical and interpretive thinkers, the students have questioned the meritocracy paradigm and at times have clearly disputed the functionalist view in numerous ways. The students recognize that meritocracy cannot work in their favour if the conditions that exist in public schools do not accommodate their aspiration for success.

So on numerous occasions, the students have challenged the functionalist view (of course, not explicitly for the most part) as they recognize the unfairness and injustice of what they have experienced in public schools. For example, the following is one student's remark of unfair and unjust experience in school: "When kids raise their hands to ask the teacher for help you don't go, 'Oh no, you don't need help – you can't, or you just don't want to learn'" (S - 14). This is a representation of some of the cracks that exist in the school system that is endorsed by proponents of functionalism. When students perceive that they are being treated unfairly and unjustly, they challenge the school by putting up modes of resistance (McLaren, 1994). Resistance may take many forms, for example; truancy, vandalism, drinking, taking drugs, prostituting, burglary, and finally severing ties

with the school by dropping out (Willis, 1976; Ogbu, 1978; Oakes, 1985; Rist, 1970; McLaren, 1994).).

The meaning of these cracks and their significance are unique to this study, the students interviewed and the context in which this study is placed. The following sections examine some of these cracks and what they mean to the students in this study. Some of the cracks in functionalism, or contentious issues discussed in the section entitled, "How students at-risk perceive public high schools" appear to be in direct contradiction to the students' expressed beliefs on the virtue of the functionalist view of school success. But the section is an analysis of the students' reality; it is of their lived experiences in school. This emphasizes the complexity of what students say hence, the need to really listen to them.

I have chosen to use an eclectic framework of theories in educational sociology for the analysis of this study because of the complex attitudes of students and conflicting perspectives that emerge from the narratives of students' voices. Since the students' narratives appear indeed to be complex and conflicting, one is cautioned against the danger of relying solely on abstract sociological analyses and generalizing, or stereotyping students based on a sample of a particular group of students. But, should instead listen to the students' stories and include their narratives in any analysis of their views.

8.2 HOW STUDENTS AT-RISK PERCEIVE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

8.2.1 Large classes

Most students in this study view public high schools as institutions where they experienced failure. For the most part, they suggest that the opportunity for their success in public schools is quite minimal. They have cited a number of reasons to support their view. In what follows I examine some of the reasons that were expressed.

Some students find the school buildings too large and as such, they have a tendency to feel lost in them. From a historical perspective, the issue of large schools was pointed out earlier in this thesis as a problem for some students. This problem came to the fore in the time of Quebec's expansion during the period of the Quiet Revolution and has lingered on to the present time. Here is how one student describes his dilemma in a public school because he found it too big: "Normal schools, they are too big. You can get lost in them very easily. You can't find the place. If you are looking for a classroom you can't even find it. You're going round and round in circles and circles trying to find it. I couldn't find the cafeteria once" (S – 1). Noddings (1992) posits that large schools can have adverse effect on some students learning. She writes:

For many – especially at the secondary level – their classrooms are located in large schools, 1200-2000 students, sometimes more. Teachers in these schools often cannot distinguish students from strangers on campus. (p. 2)

Students view large class size as another contributing factor to their failure in public high schools. Teachers are unable to give them the needed attention. "When I was in the public school I was skipping most of the time. You have a teacher –

student ratio of 1:25, or 1:30. They have to let us go at our own pace and not let us stick with the class because some of the kids could go faster, but some of the kids go slower” (S – 15). Glasser (1986) agrees with the students’ view when he suggests that governments would be able to save a tremendous amount of money from reduced crime if class sizes were lowered and school programs increased in its richness. Reduced class size allows for increased amount of time a teacher can attend to each student.

8.2.2 Unfair treatment and lack of involvement

Some students remarked that they are treated unfairly in public schools. One student said: “I asked a teacher, Miss can you come and help me with this problem? And she is like, ‘No, I can’t, it’s a quiz.’ But then I see she is helping everybody else. Then I go, Miss how do you expect me to do your work when I don’t know how to do it? She said, ‘O.K, get out of the class – you are not doing any work!’ But I don’t know how to do it” (S – 14). Noddings (1992) states that some students who lack trust in their teachers often resort to being disrespectful to the teachers. Noddings (1992) also suggests that when students perceive teachers as being unfair they become alienated from their schoolwork and separate themselves from the teachers. Frequently, this leads them to go adrift in a world that they perceive as baffling and hostile and eventually some give up on school.

Students said that they get turned off school when they have homework that they can’t do, and they have no help. Here is one student’s experience. “I went to another school. Then I used to skip everyday in that school, because in the

classrooms O.K. I used to do my homework and teachers used to say, 'No, it's not done!' I used to have the homework in front of their face. They say, 'No, it's not done!' They would kick me out and they send me back home to the group home. Then I came the next morning. I go back, I said to myself, 'If I did my homework they gonna kick me out like they did yesterday.' So I stayed in the mall all day. I never wanted to go to school so they shipped me here for six months" (S -11).

Erickson's (1993) view of "school failure" is fitting to describe this student's story. Erickson (1993) defines "school failure" as "a reflexive process by which schools 'work at' failing their students and students 'work at failing' to achieve in school...[school failure in this sense is] something the school does well as well as what the student does" (p. 336).

The students also contend that they do not have a voice in public schools because they are not listened to. "I was not listened to, and I was not given a chance to explain in the first place..." (S – 15). Critical theory gives primacy to students' voice (McLaren, 1994; Greene, 1988; Giroux, 1971). Proponents of critical theory suggest that when students are given a voice it means that they have at their disposal the opportunity to make themselves heard and define themselves as active participants in their own learning. It is important for students to have the opportunity to retell a text in his or her own words (Bakhtin, 1986). Sometimes students are criticized for their personal view on a topic, if the view does not correspond with that of the teacher's. So the students suggested that their point of view is not respected. "The teacher gives us a written assignment to do. It's supposed to be on what you think or feel about something. But it's not up to the

teacher's satisfaction so I'm criticized for my views" (S - 10). Contrary to these students' experience with their teachers, educators such as Gramsci (1971), Dewey (1938) and Freire (1970) have stressed the need for students to have the opportunity to value their own experiences, try to feel a part of the curriculum and of their education.

8.2.3 Feelings of not belonging

Due to the transient nature of these students, many times they are admitted to a new school in the middle of a term. At this time, not much effort is made by the staff of the receiving school to introduce the new student to the school departments and its facilities. So this young person who is already lacking in self-confidence is left feeling bewildered and lost. The students suggested that they are uncomfortable in public schools because there is a perception that they are unwelcome and unwanted— they don't count. One student's remark is "The only opportunity we had in those schools is that we really don't count. That's the only opportunity we had" (S - 13).

They often act out in classes and behave in unacceptable ways in the school environment to show their discomfort and displeasure. These behaviours frequently result in school suspensions. The students mentioned that suspension as a means of punishment is not only futile, but it denies them of their school time. "I didn't say anything and she kicked me out. Why should they kick us out and they want us to come to school and learn. They are kicking us out and suspending us no matter what we do. Suspending us doesn't mean anything by it - we are just going to go off and take the day off from school. If they want us to learn so much and

they keep suspending us, nothing is going to get better. That's what I found in schools that I don't like" (S – 14). This student also expresses the view that the notion of compulsory education is contradictory to the action of suspension. When students are frequently in trouble, instead of getting the needed help, their view is that they are siphoned off to other schools. "They just don't want the kid. They just don't want to help them. They just say, 'Good-bye!' When they get in too much trouble, they just say, 'Don't even bother – you're a troublemaker. Go to another school.' They send them to another school" (S – 13).

Some students describe public high schools and their personnel as uncaring and this factor contributes to their disconnection from school. Here are the voices of two students expressing this view. "The teachers in those schools, let's say not for control! It's just that teachers don't care. They don't help the kids, they teach them." (S – 1) "I don't ask the teachers to know the life story of every student, but I would ask of them to notice when they are not interested and not taking it for granted. It's just maybe asking a few questions after class if things are O.K, or if they need help or something. Sometimes students won't go to the teacher or ask for help" (S – 7).

8.2.4 Democracy in the classroom

Democracy in the classroom may alleviate boredom and encourage more positive participation. Students contend that they need to be more involved in their school programs. For example, one student suggested that he would like his Home Economics teacher to take suggestions from the class about what they would like to

cook. In this way, he would have an opportunity to participate in planning the dishes that are prepared. “This would make it more interesting and fun. She is not like the older Home Economics teachers. They don’t like teaching. They just let us do cookies and stuff like that, but she asks us what we want to do. Like let’s say we’re supposed to do souvlaki and last week we did milk shakes, we did banana split. We did all kinds of stuff. We did roast potatoes or something. We do all kinds of things. Like cooking for a restaurant - we did rice crispy squares. We do all kinds of things, where as with the other Home Economics teacher, we had to do one thing every week you nuh! But with this teacher we decide what to do - the whole class. O.K, we wrote what we want to do. And if there is a majority the majority wins” (S - 8).

The students are echoing Dewey’s (1938, 1956) recommendation of associated living as the means for both education and democracy. Dewey (1902) insisted that students must be involved in the construction of objectives for their own learning; that they must seek and formulate problems and not simply solve ready-made problems. For Dewey, education depended on action, knowledge and ideas that emerged only from situations in which the students had to draw from them out of their experiences that had meaning and importance to them. These situations had to occur in a social context, such as the classroom, where students joined in manipulating materials, and thus created a community of learners who built their knowledge together.

The students’ suggestion of democracy in classroom goes beyond the social construction of knowledge to also include the theory of psychological

constructivism as is advanced by Piaget's (1973) work in, *To understand is to invent*, and Brunner's (1990) work reported in *Acts of meaning*. Piaget's constructivism is based on psychological development of children's minds whereby he called on teachers to understand the development of the mental development of their students. The fundamental basis of learning, he believes, is discovery. In autonomous activity, students must discover relationships and ideas in classroom situations that involve activities of interest to them. Understanding is built up step by step through the process of active involvement. His stated view is: "To understand is to discover, or reconstruct by rediscovery, and such conditions must be complied with if the future individuals are to be formed who are capable of production and not simple repetition" (1973: 27).

The major theme in the theoretical framework of Brunner's (1990) work, is that of learning as active process in which students construct new ideas and concepts based on their current or past knowledge. Brunner contends that the concept of constructivism in learning provides students the opportunity to select and transform information, construct hypotheses and make decisions by relying on cognitive structure. Cognitive structure (i.e., schemata, mental models) provides meaning and organization to experiences and allows each student to go "beyond the information given" (1990: 17).

As cited earlier in this thesis, the issue of students' lack of involvement has been a historical problem. The lack of involvement in students' learning has been advanced as a contributing factor to the high school dropout phenomenon throughout the history of education in Canada (Magnuson, 1992). The students in

this study have also referred to such an issue as one that militates against them – in their quest for school success. In my view, the students in this study are not asking for anything outrageous. They are requesting to have the opportunities that thinkers in the realm of reproduction theory (Greene, 1988; McLaren, 1994; Gramsci, 1971; Giroux, 1983; Apple, 1986 among others) and psychological constructivism (Piaget, 1973; Brunner, 1990) have suggested necessary for school success. As such, it would be advantageous to all concerned (students, schools and policy-makers) if the voices of these students were heard.

8.2.5 Where does the blame rest?

Despite the students' disenchanted views of public schools most of them indicated that they did not blame the schools for their failure. They suggested that the schools did not fail them, but they failed themselves. One student remarked that although it was not his fault, he should have worked harder. He said, "I was thinking that I should have worked harder, but that wasn't really my fault because I wasn't in the schools long enough. But I think I should have tried harder anyway" (S – 1). Others contend that the schools tried to help them but they refused the help that was extended. "In the past I failed. I failed Grade 7 two times. But the school could not have helped me because I didn't want it" (S – 18). In this regard, Anyon (1990) contends that the individualistic focus and types of evaluation in schools teach children that they are responsible for their own failures and academic shortcomings. In expressing this view, Anyon (1990) writes that schools teach students that their failures lie in their own "lack of motivation, low achievement, disadvantage, or inattention"... Schools also foster "blaming the victim" by shifting the terms of failure

to the student, rather than to the “failure of the institution to meet the student’s needs by providing successful pedagogy” (p. 179).

Anyon’s argument of the schools “blaming the victim” emphasizes one of the contradictions that some students experience in their school life. At the same time it supports the complexity of the narratives that are told by the students in this study. As argued above, the students appear to have accepted the functionalist view of school success, yet the stories of their school experiences are in direct opposition of what they say about functionalism. The build up of incongruence between the students’ lived experiences and the “internalized” views of the school as is advocated by the functionalist paradigm tend to cause tension in students and alienate them from school (McLaren, 1994). Consequently, students often set up survival strategies in schools that are seldom associated with “mainstream or dominant practices of success” (McLaren, 1994: 207). Frequently, the strategies include challenging the public school system in various ways. As a response to these challenges by school authorities and the courts, some students are allowed to stay and fail, some are put in placement, some are pushed out, while others give up and drop out.

Again, although the students have taken the blame for their school failure, some suggested that in the lower high school grades they did not find the work challenging. This factor encouraged them to lose interest in school. “Failing in school was all my fault, because I wasn’t too serious, you know. Because throughout elementary school and up to Grade 10, school will be easy, you know. I didn’t start working. I could do it on my own just like that you know. It was too easy! Then when I got to Grade 11, I was so cocky I didn’t really bother with the

work. You have to earn your marks. Maybe, if I was challenged to do harder work, it might have been better for me. Most likely I wouldn't have thought the way I did and I would have graduated already" (S –10). Contrary to that view, some students find the work too difficult or uninteresting, so they alienate themselves from the work, the class and then the school. After a while, they take the final step and drop out. One student talked about his friend's experience in a public school. "He doesn't like the work and he is not confident in what he does in that school. So he says he wants to get a job and keep on working until he goes back to (in adult education) school" (S – 9). The issue of school alienation has been previously discussed in this dissertation as a contributing factor in the high school dropout problem both from a historical perspective (Magnuson, 1992) and a sociological stance (McLaren, 1994; Dei and company, 1997; Deyhle, D. and Swisher 1997). Yet, again these students have indicated that circumstances within the schools have alienated them, which ends with far too many of them dropping out.

About one-third of the students interviewed had the opposite opinion on the issue of whether the public schools failed them or not. These students put the blame squarely on the public schools. Here are the comments of three students on this issue:

"I think that the schools I went to before I came here failed me because, I guess I was going through hard times. I was having problems at home and that affected my studies. I guess I would have like for somebody – a teacher or a counselor, or anybody to come searching, noticing that I was slackening off and that I was not attending. I just wished that they could have done something for it dragged on for a year and then another 6 months. And that's a long time you know! I was unable to help myself at the time. I don't think the school was attentive enough" (S – 7).

“I think that the schools have failed me because when I was in Grade 4 my parents started fighting a lot and they were starting to break up. Then my grades started to go down and then they got very low. Two years after they broke up. Then they told me that I have to repeat Grade 4, but the teachers only paid attention to their favourites. I did not feel special like some of the other kids” (S – 3).

“Yeah, schools have failed me! Some of the teachers – they don’t teach you, they tell you. I remember this one school and I couldn’t understand, and the teacher would be telling me. And she eventually got angry and threw her desk at me. She threw the desk and shoved it over and I got shocked and fell off my chair. I took it, but my mom took me out of that school because the teachers were not proper towards kids. They would get angry, they would yell, they would insult us. I dislike them!” (S – 4).

On a whole students want to be in school. They want to be successful for they want to have a good job and feel good about themselves. However, they want to experience more negotiations taking place in school. They feel that public schools are far too undemocratic. In these schools, they feel that they have no voice, no one listens to their suggestions and teachers do not care about them. Most of all, they are not allowed to be active participant in their learning. So they are resentful of the public school system. “All the while I’ll just go to school and sit there and don’t do any work you know! Probably have a fake I.D on me or something. So the school failed me” (S – 14).

Of course, the students’ perception of the opportunity to achieve success in public schools is in stark contrast to proponents of functionalist theory. Functionalists view public schools as embodying all the elements necessary for each student to achieve success – if they work hard enough and want to succeed (Dreeben, 1968; Parsons, 1951; Merton, 1967). But, the students in this study have demonstrated that the opportunities for the success they “crave” are sadly lacking in the public schools that they have attended.

8.3 HOW STUDENTS PERCEIVE SOCIAL AFFAIRS SCHOOLS

8.3.1 Renewed interest in school

Most of the students in social affairs schools suggested that they like these schools because they are small and offer a more relaxed atmosphere than large public schools. “First of all school – I like this school. I think a lot of it for sure! Just nice teachers, lots of interesting things to do that you can’t do in a normal school” (S – 1). “You get all the help you need when you need it here. The teachers all know when you don’t want to be bothered, they don’t bother you. They help you when they can” (S –10).

In their view the teachers in social affairs schools have been very instrumental in reviving their interest in school. They indicated that the present interest they have in school is allowing them to experience school success. “Well, I think it’s good here because in English - before I came here in English I didn’t know how to write, I know how to read words like dog, or of, or stuff like that. I didn’t know words before, but now I know how to read and write big stories and stuff like that. But my writing has to improve though” (S - 11).

The student – teacher ratio is low so students get the attention they need. The ratio of teacher to students is 1:8 and in some cases it is 1:6. However, the ratio changes daily because of the transient nature of the students. “Learning is kind of fun here, because the Math class is a small class. Sometimes there are ten students in the class, sometimes there are under ten, sometimes seven and sometimes three you know - it depends. It’s not like my other schools because they are bigger. So in this class you actually sit one on one with the teacher’s help - so like I feel that

it's satisfactory. So he can show me to do it, and stuff like that" (S – 10). "In this school, I get the help I need because you know there is small class. The teacher can go discuss and help you if you need it. She doesn't have to grab fifty or sixty students before she gets to you and all that, so it's easy for her. Here there are six or eight of us in a class – and sometimes only four of us are in class" (S – 13).

Students suggested that teachers in these schools care about them, listen to them and are always there to help them with schoolwork. "If you need somebody to speak to, just ask to speak to a teacher" (S – 10). "I think this school has a good program because of the like smaller classes. The people get – like I'm closer to the teachers. The teachers are always there to help them around the schoolwork" (S – 9).

Students commented that for the most part they experience success in these schools because the teachers understand them and they get a lot of support from social workers and child-care-workers. They refer to child-care workers who are assigned to them as my "staff". "Well, at the moment I'm attending this school. This school is a very different school. It's an alternative school within a group home. The majority of students don't go to these types of school. In this school I like the fact that there is one teacher that is teaching all the subjects. And that she spends quite a bit of time with each focusing on their needs and the way they learn, and understanding their problems – whether they can't concentrate or have problems with a subject. The teacher here is very nice. She is understanding. She pushes you to succeed if you want to succeed. I didn't like the public schools very much" (S – 7).

Students are allowed to work at their own pace, and as such competition among students for marks is de-emphasized. Some students find this practice to be quite helpful with their learning. “I guess I would lie if I said that I didn’t care. I guess the only reason when I was in high school with a lot of students was the competition. But now that I’m here, I just want to do well. I’m not interested in getting really high marks. Maybe I should, but that’s the type of person I am. But I guess I wouldn’t be satisfied if my marks were really low. I have interest of going on to college, so my interest now is going on to graduate from high school and get my diploma. So whatever it takes, I’m going to do that to graduate” (S – 7).

8.3.2 Attached stigma and lack of freedom

Most students prefer to be in the large public schools because of the stigma attached to social affairs schools. They also want to be with their friends in the public schools. They want to feel “normal.” “My main goal is to get out of placement. And that’s been working very well. I’m going to be going home very soon. I also want to get into a regular school system next year because I don’t want to associate myself with group homes and Youth Protection. I want to live at home. I want to live a normal life with my friends. Even though I’m doing well here, I would much prefer to be in a regular public school” (S – 6).

The topic of abnormality of their surroundings frequently surfaced in the interviews. There was a marked consciousness of being schooled in social affairs settings and having to live on these campuses. To express his resentment about this issue, one student said, “As a person – I don’t know what to say. I’m a normal person, I guess. I’m normal – not abnormal, but just look where I live!” (S – 18).

Glasser (1986) argues that we learn for power, love and freedom, but the students in social affairs lack a certain amount of freedom. Students are not allowed to leave the campus without permission. They are not allowed to leave at lunch time and go to the store like students in the public schools. "I find it better than the other schools, but I find it boring. The other schools, you have more periods – but like you have more freedom. But this school here, you can't have any freedom at all, because you can't go off - like after school because you are in a group home – and that's their view" (S - 8).

The physical space of these schools is limited, and the number of teachers in each one is few, a premium is placed on the amount of activities that the schools can offer. In this sense, students feel that their education in these schools is being compromised.

School is not a factor in the decision to discharge a student from any of the residential settings. The deciding factors are strictly legal and, or psycho-social ones. This tends to militate against the students because they are forced to change schools at any time during the school year.

Although students prefer to have small classes, some argue that it may militate against them when they are reintegrated into public schools. For the most part, the classes in the public schools are about four times the size of those in social affairs schools. The mandate of these schools is to prepare these students for reintegration into public schools or the workforce and not for high school graduation. "The bad thing it is, since the classes are so small the students get

used to having someone beside them all the time so it won't help them much when they are on the outside" (S – 9).

8.4 TEACHERS

8.4.1 Teachers in public schools

Students generally perceive teachers as having knowledge and power, and as such their behaviour is guided by clear rules, expectations and principles (Woods, 1983). The most important factors among the generality of students – are that teachers should be kind, fair, be able to make class fun, they should care for their students and offer them encouragement. On the whole, teachers should be “human.” They should also be able to teach so that the students understand the first time the lesson is taught. When students perceive that teachers meet their expectations, conflicts usually diminish and they respond more favourably to school.

In New France teachers had no training; they were hired on the basis that they could teach children to read, write, count and know God (Magnuson, 1992). The move to improve education during the Quiet Revolution in Quebec saw a major revamping of teacher training programs (as mentioned earlier). So in today's high schools, teachers are generally hired on the basis of their subject speciality (Henchey and Burgess, 1987). Each teacher is presumed to have the ability to teach the subject in which he/her specializes. The primary duty of high school teachers is to transmit their knowledge, skills and the behavioural patterns they consider important to their students (Bennett and LeCompte, 1995). For the most part, the knowledge that is transmitted to high school students is geared towards preparing them for CEGEP and

university (Teacher interviewed in this study). But there is a problem in this structure because there are students who cannot cope with both the rigour of the school program and the structure of the school. These students eventually become disengaged and some drop out (School administrator interviewed in this study).

In the classrooms, the students' desks are generally placed in neat rows facing the teacher's desk. The teacher's desk is usually placed at the front of the class. Bowles and Gintis describe this setting as one that corresponds with that of the work place. The interactionist suggests that many physical contexts communicate many powerful messages from their makers to their users (Edwards and Furlong, 1987). In this case, Woods (1983) demonstrates that the traditional classroom setting that is described above "has been both a symbol of reinforcement and centrally controlled interaction" (p. 22). The interactionist would view decentralized group work and student's participation as almost an impossible task in such a classroom setting (Edwards and Furlong, 1978). The school day is usually broken up into seven periods. This of course, differs from school to school. There are certain rules and regulations that must be adhered to throughout each school day, and in most cases the teacher of each class has his/her own set of rules that must be followed.

In this setting, at the beginning of each class students are expected to enter the classroom with their materials and sit in their assigned or unassigned seats. Some students find the demands of going through such a strict and ordered day very challenging. Sometimes their life experiences do not fit into the orderliness and structure of the school. This makes coping with school quite difficult. For example, "I have taught in a regular school where a child came in from a group home. He was

not getting a thing done in school, so I phoned the group home and they told me that the police was there until three or four o'clock in the morning. I'm sure that this happens in some homes where parents are fighting till four o'clock in the morning and the child comes to school" (Teacher interviewed, 1999). Then again, students themselves may have had problems with the police. They might have been locked up for a few hours in a detention centre. But whatever the case may be, the student is expected to be punctual for school each day. In most of these cases the student will arrive late for school and without having his/her homework done. These patterns of misdemeanours result in students' suspensions and they may even be asked to leave the school. The stories the students told are rife with examples of these cases.

Teachers in the public schools do not attend to students who do not fit into the monolithic structure (Lessard, 1987). "What students bring to school is often underscored – in cultures, in their own backgrounds and their own life experiences highly under valued and under rated in schools" (Public school administrator, 1999). Their focus is to get students ready for final exams. Students who are unable to cope must go somewhere else. This is the difference between the teachers in the public schools and teachers in social affairs schools.

If we are talking about students who cannot cope– cannot achieve at the various level of our educational system (not everyone is), we are trying to put everyone in a square peg and every body has to be square to fit in there. Well, in education we have the round ones that can't fit in there. So there have to be programs established to meet the needs and abilities of those students. Not everybody finishes high school granted, but everybody can achieve something (Public school administrator, 1999).

However, there are too many underachievers who finally give up on learning in school and drop out. This has been one of the major concerns expressed by

different educational thinkers throughout this thesis (Dei and colleagues, 1997; Deyhle and Swisher, 1997; McLaren, 1994 among others). Katherine Conner (1989) refutes the argument advanced by the functionalists of “fixing” the students so that they can cope with the programs as they are in schools. Conner’s notion is that if schools are to be effective, they need to adjust their programs to accommodate their students.

8.4.2 Teachers in social affairs schools

The teachers from social affairs schools recognize that each child is placed in one of these schools because he/she is having difficulty. When each student is admitted to a social affairs school his/her problems are pre-identified. So when the student shows up in a teacher’s class, he or she has previous knowledge of that student and is prepared to accept the student in class. “They (students) bring a challenge for sure. They bring challenge to the teacher. Often, they are so jaded that you have to work hard to get over that. The negative experience they’ve had has caused them to be very angry. But everyone brings something. Everyone has a valid point. I do not devalue anyone’s contribution based on their culture and experience” (Teacher, 1999).

“I think that the greatest challenge in working with these students is to really let them know that they are somebody. They really have poor self-respect. They haven’t developed their own personality. They really feel badly about themselves because of the things they have done, or the things they are doing. I think the greatest challenge for a teacher in this place, is to get them back so that they can respect themselves. Once they respect themselves I think that you can really do a lot with them” (Teacher, 1999).

Whereas the primary focus of public school teachers is to prepare students for CEGEP and university, the primary focus of social affairs teachers is to prepare their students for reintegration into public schools, or the work force. Teachers in social affairs schools know their students and why they are there. Teachers in social affairs schools have a low student – teacher ratio, and support from Agency workers in school. The teachers work with Individual Educational Plans (IEP) for students, in conjunction with Individual Treatment Plans (ITP) prepared by the Agency. This allows the teachers in social affairs schools to be more attentive to individual student's needs and to be flexible in the classroom. On the contrary, teachers in the public schools are not prepared for students who need special attention. They are not usually informed that special needs students are in their classes until this factor is manifested through the students' acting out behaviours. The teacher – student ratio in the public school falls anywhere from 1: 25 to 1: 33, and there is no classroom support for teachers with students in their classes who are classified as emotionally disturbed or learning disabled. There is no special financial allowance made to certain high schools that admit special needs students (Public high school administrator, 1999).

The general perception of teachers in public schools by the students in social affairs schools is poor. Unlike Bowles and Gintis (1976) who do not blame teachers for the failures in public schools, these students accused the teachers of being at the root of most of their problems in one course or another. Sometimes the teachers are blamed for the students' entire failure in a particular school. There are some classes that the students "hate", not because of the course content, but because of the teacher. "I hate Mr./Miss...class. He/she is so dumb!" Generally, when students have this

type of negative perception, they tend to be alienated both from the teachers and the courses that are being taught – and to a broader extent the school itself.

8.4.3 Teacher-Student relationship: Students' perspectives

The students in social affairs schools are quite cognizant of the difference in the relationship they share with teachers in public schools and that of teachers in their present school. They perceive public school teachers as being aloof and uncaring whereas they say that the opposite is true of teachers in social affairs schools. Noddings (1992) posits that although not everyone wants to be cuddled, everyone wants to be received and to elicit a response that is congruent with an underlying need or desire. Evidently the students have not been able to elicit the appropriate responses from public school teachers to satisfy their needs.

Noddings (1992) writes, “When I care, I really hear, see, or feel what the other tries to convey” (p. 16). Having caring teachers in public schools has not been the experience of these students. Although most of them do not blame the public schools for their failure, they do blame teachers for not giving them the needed attention. “I dislike teachers...they do not help you. They ignore you like chopped liver” (S - 3). They also accused public school teachers of being too authoritative, conducting boring classes, depriving them of the opportunity to participate in their learning, not listening to them, and being inflexible. “They (teachers) should listen to us and let us try on our own terms” (S – 8). Another student says, “I don’t like the teacher, who is grumpy, that has a temper that always comes to class in a bad mood. He is rude at times, inconsiderate and very strict” (S – 7). The students suggested that they do not

like most of their teachers in the public schools. “What I dislike is my teacher in the other schools. I dislike teachers. Some teachers are all right, but most of them I don’t like” (S – 3).

The classrooms should be comfortable and relaxed and the students should be able to laugh with the teacher in class. So students in social affairs schools address their teachers on a first name basis. This helps to reduce the authoritative figure of the teacher and contributes to a more relaxed and comfortable school environment. “A teacher should be someone that is able to joke around a little bit and not always serious – and makes it a comfortable place to sit in the class. Instead of coming in – and like if you laugh at something you’re gonna get into trouble. That kind of stuff isn’t right. I think people are more inclined to be comfortable in a place if they feel that it’s all right to smile. They should make you feel comfortable in the classroom” (S - 16). Teachers should be respectful and be understanding of their special situation. In their view, teachers should like to teach and love children. “I like a teacher who is responsible, likes to teach and loves to be a teacher – to help students and is fair with respect...Never give up on students, but just be there for them” (S – 8).

The students credit social affairs teachers with the above qualities. Here are some of the remarks that were made about the teachers in social affairs schools: “All my teachers here are nice” (S – 1). “They (teachers) are understanding. They help you when you need help” (S - 17). “There is a teacher here – he’s pretty cool. Sometimes when we finish our work he gives us a break to play on the computer. He brings in candies and goodies for us, and stuff like that. I like that kind of stuff” (S – 18). “She (the teacher) is friendly, you can count on her to talk to. She respects you

and respects other people's opinion" (S- 9). The teacher is, "funny, he makes me laugh. He takes something boring and makes it interesting. He is an easy going teacher" (S – 5). The teacher, "has a lot of patience because she works with all the kids. She knows how to teach very nicely and she tries very hard. If we ever need help she is there to help us" (S – 6).

However, when the students are discharged from social affairs schools for integration into public schools their pattern of unacceptable behaviours usually recurs if they do not receive a tremendous amount of follow up support from the Agency. Each student has a three months follow up period by the agency after he or she is discharged (Batshaw social worker, 1999). This may support the theory that it is not only the students who need to make adjustments to their lives, but programs should be made suitable to accommodate them (McLaren, 1994; Bennett and LeCompte, 1995; Social worker in study, 1999; Social counselor in study, 1999).

8.5 COURSES STUDENTS LIKE

Most students said that they favoured courses in Art, Drama, Woodwork, Home Economics, Auto-shop and Introduction to Technology. Although computer classes were also selected among the students' favourite courses, some pointed out that they were not interested in using the computer only as a writing tool. They wanted to learn how to take the computer apart and rebuild it like a computer technician would. The Gym was another popular selection among them. They like playing sports and some have suggested that they would like to be drafted on a professional sport's team. The subjects that the students prefer are not considered to be in the academic category. "I

like auto courses. Something that's physical you know – manual labour like Woodwork” (S – 16). “I like Home Economics, I like ITT and I like fooling around with cars” (S – 10).

As early as 1948, Canadian Research Committee studied high school dropouts. The aim of this study was to report on practical education in Canadian schools. The study concluded that a need existed for a varied high school program, including vocational education programs. As a result, vocational courses were included in the high school curriculum - which at the time was chiefly classical (Magnuson, 1992). But vocational education was then, and continues to be relegated to a low status in the society. In schools, vocational courses were/are presented as an alternatives for students who “can’t learn” (Teacher interviewed for this project, 1999; Kincheloe, 1993). So many students, whose position in school already “fragile” ignored their talents and continued to leave school prematurely (Imel, 1993). This is most unfortunate because Imel (1993) has demonstrated that appropriately implemented vocational programs can be successful in increasing the graduation rate of high school students.

There is lack of respect for non-academic courses in public schools. Students feel that non-academic courses are generally perceived as “dumping ground” for unsuccessful academic learners. Although the Report on School Leavers (1990) indicated that some vocationally oriented high school dropouts viewed academic courses as useless, the students in this research suggested that they wanted to study academic courses. Unfortunately, for the most part they found these courses difficult to understand, but they were not given the support they needed to succeed.

Although a few students indicated that they liked English and Math they also said that they were not strong in these courses. The subjects in which they experienced success were those in the arts, vocational courses and sports. Unfortunately for these students, the courses they like and excel at are gradually being eliminated from the public schools. In a public school (where I was granted interviews with the administration and some staff members) the Art teacher now spends her time teaching two other courses instead of teaching only art to the whole school as she did before. This means that the amount of art offered in the school has been greatly reduced. The music department does not exist at that school anymore. The instruments are on loan to community organizations or rented out. The woodwork department is also closed this year. The machines were given to another school. So for the student who said, "I like some of the work on wood projects and other ways in which you can get involved. But the classwork – I hate. I don't like classwork, I just hate it." And another one who said, "The most opportunity school offers me for success is mechanics," may have very little interest in attending that school.

The public school system undervalues and or ignores a whole range of human capacities that exist among students. Therefore, a general need exists to redefine school success by taking into account programs that value other areas of students' interests. It is worthwhile repeating Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligence at this point in order to emphasize the need for schools to acknowledge and nurture students' varied talents and interests. I am convinced that such actions

could have positive impact on students thereby improving the retention rate of the public schools.

8.6 LEARNING IN SCHOOL

8.6.1 Difficulties in learning

Many students indicated that they find learning in school hard for them. “Learning in school is mostly hard” (S – 18). “I’m really not good in school. Math I’m failing. French I’m failing – mostly everything I’m failing” (S – 3). The students suggested that sometimes teachers in the public schools mistake their inability to cope with the assignments without extra help as a sign of laziness. They indicated that they have difficulty in expressing themselves in writing and did not get help in the public school. These experiences are quite frustrating to the students. Sometimes this frustration turns to uncontrolled anger. The result of uncontrolled anger is usually physical confrontation. For these students are usually suspended or expelled from school. Most of the students in this project are in placement because of physical and verbal aggression.

They tend to find academic classes boring and some students escape the boredom by fooling around in these classes. “In academic classes, for example, English and French – very little learning takes place because students are always getting into trouble” (S – 16). Glasser (1986) writes, “Boring is the opposite of fun. It occurs when we have to spend time without learning. A monotonous task is always boring” (p. 29). When classes are not interesting and the students are not involved, they do get bored. Adjusting to different teachers and their teaching

styles is very difficult for them. Teachers have different teaching styles. So adjusting to different styles of teaching as they move from school to school can be very challenging for them. For example, being taught the same level Math in four different schools. “I don’t see any point in coming here. They (teachers) tell me this, they tell me that, so what’s the point? I’m confused and I get mad,” said one student (S 14). Moving from school to school and adjusting to the rules and regulations of each school is another challenge.

Most of the students remarked that another area of difficulty in learning for them lies in writing exams. “I just freak out. I can’t take exams” (S – 3). “In exams I just freeze and forget everything” (S – 8). “Well, you know at school – like outside schools, I couldn’t do any exams. I am so nervous I get sick to my stomach. I couldn’t do it. I said to myself – this voice in my head said, “You can’t do it, you’re stupid. You’re just gonna fail it anyway so what’s the point” (S – 8). Self-fulfilling prophesy (Rist, 1970). It appears then, that formal exams for most of these students exacerbate existing difficulties as opposed to testing their knowledge of a subject.

8.6.2 Learning disabilities

Learning disability appears to have a major impact on many of the students in social affairs schools. Barwick (1992) demonstrated that the anti-social behaviours of students in social affairs schools are usually exacerbated by their learning disabilities. The committee for Exceptional Children (1975) defines learning disability as referring to:

Children of any age who demonstrate a substantial deficiency in a particular aspect of academic achievement because of perceptual or perceptual motor handicaps, regardless of etiology or other contributing factors. The term perceptual in this case relates to mental (neurological) processes through which the child acquires his basic alphabets of sounds and forms. (Wepman et al., p. 306)

Policies were instituted throughout North America to provide disabled students with the opportunity to have public education “in the least restrictive environment” (Schifiani, Anderson and Odle, 1980: 8). For the most part, this meant that disabled students should be educated with able students in public schools. But these policies were not beneficial to some students with learning disabilities. Although the students were in the classes physically, little learning took place because students who were beset with problems such as perceptual learning disabilities were not readily discernible. So frequently, their inability to keep abreast of their classmates is misunderstood, viewed as laziness or ignored by some teachers and usually they did not get the needed attention. When they are in the public schools, they are often not allowed to work at their own pace and are expected to keep up with the faster students in the class. The students who have difficulty in keeping the pace with the class are left behind. Sometimes they fall so far behind that they give up in desperation and eventually drop out (Lusthaus, 1992). Conversely, some students who drop out of school are often fall under the guise of having learning disabilities, when in fact learning is stunted because they are going through traumatic experiences (poverty, incest, physical abuse, parents’ divorce, etc.). In many cases these experiences lead to the development of behavioural problems (Ruffo, 1996).

But some students expressed the notion that their learning disabilities are taken into consideration in social affairs schools. They expressed satisfaction with

the help and attention they receive in these schools. “I find it easier here than in a public school cause I’m dyslexic and I have HDD. It’s hard for me having hyperactive deficit disorder. I’m dyslexic and have Hyperactive Deficit Disorder and here, as you probably know, they help me to cope. Here, I get phenomenal education. They help me by teaching me. They are helping me learn and they sort of give me tips” (S – 4).

8.7 CHILD ABUSE

Earlier, the notion of violence among these students was broached, but what follows is the students’ interpretation of abuse and the impact it has on their schooling.

“If a child fails – the teacher is obviously going to blame the child. So they’ll say, ‘You weren’t working hard enough; you weren’t studying hard enough!’ Sometimes that might not be true – it might not be the child’s fault. It could be because the child was abused when he was younger, or something. Or it could be sexually abuse or rape, or kidney problem with a child or something – or anorexic or anything, and the child can’t study hard in school for they are too weak or something, so they could offer more time” (S – 8).

That is the way one student explained the suffering that some students experience while trying to cope with schoolwork. Some students in social affairs schools are abused physically and sexually in their homes or in the community. Consequently, they are removed from their homes by the court and placed for their protection. One student told the story about his friend’s abusive experience, while another student talked about his own experience. “My friend - she used to be at another school as a student, and now she is in a group home. And she was put in placement but her father abuses and disturbs her and stuff. That’s why they took her

away and put her in a group home where he can't find her and stuff" (S – 11). "My father - when I was smaller, verbally and physically abused me. That's one of the reasons at one time I had gone to a group home, because I'd had enough at home and I just couldn't take it anymore" (S – 5).

Various types of abuses have been inflicted on these students and others like them. They have talked of experiencing physical, emotional and verbal abuse, while they have also been neglected and abandoned because of parental difficulties. The stories they have told are symptomatic of the pervasion of child abuse in Quebec. A police report revealed that in 2001, twenty-five percent of sex assault cases were committed on children between the ages of 0 – 13 years old, while 13 – 17 year olds account for twenty-two percent of the cases (Sex Assault Squad Report, 2003). The situation in which these students find themselves cannot be trivialized or ignored if they are to be successful in school and to be productive citizens in this society.

8.8 FRIENDS OF STUDENTS IN SOCIAL AFFAIRS SCHOOLS

8.8.1 Students' relationship with friends

In terms of relationship, there can be little doubt that what matter most to some students in school is – friendship among themselves. "Friendship groups form the structural basis of the child's extra-curricula activities from a very early stage. Without friends, one is outside the pale of society...Friends are therefore of prime consideration in the decision a pupil has to make, and to some, they are the very first priority throughout school and in choosing an occupation" (Woods, 1983: 98).

In this study, the students indicated that they formed friendship groups in three ways. First, friendship may begin at the early childhood stage because they lived and grew up in the same community. “Most of my friends were from the same area. I grew up in NDG – not a very rich area” (S - 16). Second, friendship is usually formed with students who have similar life experiences. “I’d grown up with them all my life. I would surround myself with people with similar difficulties” (S - 16). And third, friendship is formed when a group allows someone new to enter it. “These two kids that live in my district, they come from France and everybody hates them. But me and my brother we like them ‘cause of their accent. It’s fun - we like how they talk! We think it’s funny that’s why we keep on hanging around with them” (S – 11).

With these types of friendship formation, the students have a wide choice of ethnicity and cultures from which to choose their friends. “All my friends – they’re all the same and some of them come from Jamaica, from Haiti, from Italy, from Spain and from the East End. Some of them came from - from what you call it - from France” (S – 11). Most of the students commented that when they choose their friends, ethnicity and culture are irrelevant to them, because each friend is perceived as a Canadian. “I have lots of friends. Some are Greek, some are from the West Indies, and some are Portuguese, but they are all Canadians. Having many friends appear to give the students an elevated status. Only a few students stated that they did not have many friends. Most students said that they had lots of friends. “I have a lot of friends. I make a lot of big parties so I get to have like one hundred people there” (S – 12).

The students contend that friends are “people you hang around with and have a blast” (S – 13). Their friends provide a certain amount of freedom for each other because together, they do whatever they want. There is not usually a planned program or structure for the events that take place when they are together. “When we are together, we just basically do what we want – we go out get high, take drugs in the mall and go see people” (S – 12). They described their friends as not being “nice,” because they are involved in illegal drugs and alcohol. One student said: “My friends are not nice and they are on drugs, drink and stuff like that” (S - 14).

In spite of the general negative description of their friends, the students contend that they have certain expectations of the people they called friends. They suggested that what is important to their friendship are people having the same interests, being nice, loyal, honest, respectful and caring. Friends should also be there for each other and be willing to listen. “I like my friends to have respect – that’s the first thing. The second thing is like the relationship where people like listen to you. They don’t like turn around and go to others all the time or they hang around and being used” (S – 9). “For me, I like my friends to be honest and respect you for what you do – not just for what you wear or how much money you have, and how much things you have (S - 10).

Some students indicated that they are strongly influenced by their friends. This of course impacted negatively on their school life and their life in the community. One student said, “I used to get myself in trouble – drinking, doing drugs, breaking and entering in NDG and things like that, but now I just go to little parties and movies. I used to like fighting all the time causing trouble and I chose

them. I'd go where they would be doing that and there would be laughing, and there would be a gang and I'd like to do that so I'd go with them" (S – 12). "At this school - we had like these talent shows – so we used to dance a lot in that school. I was able to do my dancing and was successful then. A lot of schools provide sports and the teachers even pushed me to do well. I was very good. But I changed four schools and was placed here because of my friends.

8.8.2 The students' friends' view of school

Many of the students stated that their friends do not like school. They find school boring and they are frequently suspended. Consequently, some are in placement, some are planning to drop out and some have already dropped out of high school. Glasser (1986) explained that as students get to high school they relinquish their dependency on their teachers and to some extent their parents. They begin to depend more on their friends to satisfy their needs of belonging. In this case if their friends work hard in school, they will work hard too to keep the friendship. However, if their friends are dissatisfied with school like they are, their friendship will be strengthened by the fact that they all hate school. On this issue, one student said, "I have my cousin. He knows two of my friends. They do drugs and they drink and all that. Most of my friends live in the Point and NDG. Some of them are Chinese and some are Black. My friends - they don't like school. I know one that hate school - like he is in Lyle (Pavilion). Some of my friends are in placement now for B & E and some for family troubles" (S – 12).

However, there is a small number of students whose friends do like school and plan to graduate from high school in the youth sector or in the adult sector.

“My friends are not perfect, but some of them like school. Some plan to finish school and some will drop out.” “My friends did not like school. They were not doing good in school. Some of them plan to drop out of school” (S – 8). “One of them dropped out this year because he did not find that the people there are mature enough at the school he was going. He also dropped out because he was having problems with his father because he divorced his mother. He needed time to think about what he had done. He is seventeen, but he is going to school next year for trade school” (S – 9).

Friendship is an important element in the lives of these students. They say that their friends understand them. They trust their friends because they are always there for them. If they are hungry their friends will feed them. If they have no clothes their friends will clothe them and when they have no shelter their friends will put them up. Their friends encourage them to stay out of trouble and stay in school. Parents usually want their children to hang out with friends whose behaviour and values are acceptable in their view. But in these schools race and the family’s social standing do not appear to have too much impact on friendship. Friendship appears to be mostly valued for their shared experiences. Some students are so enmeshed in their groups that they do not realize the influence their friends have on them. “Well they (friends) do not have any influence on me. I mean we all have the same the mind. Basically, we just do the same thing” (S - 17). Consequently, police, probation officers, child-care workers and social workers try to keep juvenile offenders (young offenders) away from the influence of their old friends, but this task has frequently proven to be a difficult one.

8.9 STUDENTS IN SOCIAL AFFAIRS SCHOOLS AND DROPOUTS

Most of the students in this study said that they knew some one who had dropped out of high school. Some of them had parents and relatives who had dropped out, while others knew of friends. They appeared to have found the experiences of those who had dropped out of school very bleak. The dropouts were described as people who moved from one low paying job to another and were frequently unemployed. Consequently, these students are desirous of successfully completing high school and avoid dropping out. Except for one student, they indicated that they are looking forward to leaving high school with a diploma. The student, who plans to drop out as soon as he is discharged from the reception centre, stated that his grandfather was a very successful businessman without a high school diploma. He argued that he did not need one because he plans to live on the Kibbutz in Israel.

8.10 STUDENTS' VALUES

8.10.1 Fair play, freedom and the need to be heard

Simon, Howe and Kirschenbaum (1978) express the notion that everything we do, every decision we make and every course of action we take, is based consciously or unconsciously on our beliefs, attitudes and values. The students in social affairs schools are often in conflict with the values of their culture and the values of the larger society. For example, most of these students express the notion that lying, stealing and cheating are acceptable as long as they are not caught. However, they have a keen sense of fair play when matters are pertaining to them.

They place a high premium on fairness, for they believe that teachers and adults should be fair to them.

They also value a certain amount of freedom within the structure of the classroom. Teachers in these schools tend to dispense with the rigid classroom structure that is evident in the regular public schools. For example, as long as their clothes are clean and not ripped their dress code is not an issue in these schools. Students are not usually expected to sit in classrooms where the desks and chairs are arranged in uniformly straight rows. Neither are they asked to spend fifty minutes of class time listening to a lecture. For the most part, the periods are structured to entertain interaction and students' involvement.

They value their teachers being “human.” That is in school, teachers should be able to have a laugh with them, and listen to their concerns with sympathy. Most of all teachers should show that they care for them. One student said, “My favourite teacher – she is caring” (S – 12).

8.10.2 Respect

One of the categories that is consistent with the theme of value for these students is respect. Respect plays a major role in their lives. They thrive on being treated with respect, and it elevates their self-esteem. When they give respect to anyone, that person is held in high regard. Respect is not taken for granted by the students in social affairs schools. Should students view a situation as being disrespectful to them in anyway, their pride will be wounded. But here too, the value they place on receiving respect from others, is often times contrary to the respect they show to others. They sometimes use disrespect as a means of defense,

especially if there is a confrontation with an authority figure. They may even explode and resort to violence if they felt that they were treated with a lack of respect, or if they refused to adhere to a rule.

8.11 THE FACTORS OF CLASS, RACE AND GENDER

8.11.1 Parents' level of schooling

In this study, the level of parents' education ranged from elementary to university. Almost one-fourth of the students' fathers had elementary education. Some of them dropped out of high school, while a little over one-fourth of them graduated from high school. A very small number of fathers graduated from university, but some fathers' level of education was unknown.

The mothers of these students stayed in school longer than their fathers, but 17 percent of them dropped out of high school. A smaller number of mothers graduated from university than fathers, but more mothers graduated from college. The ratio of mothers who graduated from high school was very close to that of fathers. The mothers' level of education that was unknown is the same as the fathers' level.

8.11.2 Employment of parents

Fathers of these students were employed in a variety of jobs – ranging from blue collar, clerical to professionals. One student's stepfather is a doctor and his father is a lawyer. Mothers were employed mostly in the service industry, clerical areas and some stayed home.

Throughout the historical development of education in Canada, it has been noted that one's level of education significantly defines one's socio-economic status. For the most part, the parents of these students possess a low level of education, are employed in low paying jobs and some of them are single parents. Consequently, their economic status is low.

These students are at risk of dropping out of high school. According to the economic reproduction theory (Bowles and Gintis, 1976, 2002; Persell, 1977), should these students eventually leave school prematurely, the economic experiences of their parents' lives would be perpetuated through them. The reproduction of harsh economic experiences is blamed on the public school system in correspondence theory of Bowles and Gintis (1976, 2002).

In her theory on structure of dominance, Persell (1977) argues that individuals and groups in society strive to maintain and advance their relative positions to others (p. 21). It is very difficult for economically disadvantaged members of this society to break the cycle of poverty and low status because they are powerless and voiceless. So Persell (1977) expresses the notion of conflict rather than a functional view of occupational advantage in the market situation (p. 24).

8.11.3 Race

From a racial perspective the result of the study is not consistent with the literature. According to the literature minority students should have been overwhelming represented in this study, but more than half of the students in this study were white, and both of their parents were born in Canada. Over one-fourth

of the students were born of mixed parents (most are of white Canadian mothers and European spouses, while a much smaller group are of white Canadian fathers with European spouses). The smallest group of students had parents from Italy and Egypt, while a similar amount had parents from the West Indies. All the students were born in Canada. Economic and racial factors are closely linked, but although most of the students are from working class families they were not from racial minority groups.

Although no ethnic group or race was over-represented by the students who participated in this project, some teachers remarked that Aboriginal and Black students are usually over-represented in some of social affairs schools.

8.11.4 Gender

The issue of schooling and gender was consistent with the literature both for the parents and the students in this study. The mothers are reported to have stayed in school longer than the fathers did. The problem of more boys being at risk than girls emerged very forcefully in this study. Sixteen of the respondents were boys, while two were girls. The average age of both boys and girls who participated in the study was fifteen years.

With respect to the issue of gender, the students in this study appeared to have conservative thoughts. All the boys wanted to play basketball and most of them indicated that they are aspiring to be professional basketball players. They admire the famous basketball players for their talent and the money they are able to earn. Some wanted to be in the music industry and one student wanted to be involved with the movie industry as a movie producer. For the most part, the boys

aligned themselves along traditional masculine activities and thoughts, while the girls kept within the traditional female boundaries. One girl was aspiring to be a nurse, while the other admired a queen as her role model.

The study has demonstrated that historically, the factors of class, race and gender have impacted on Canadian education system, and as such, have important implications for the high school dropout issue. It has also supported the critical perspective that class, race and gender are intricately intertwined with school success. For as critical theorists point out, the historical perspective of schooling is based upon hierarchical notions of class, race and gender in society, and public schools were used as social control.

From a conflict perspective, Persell (1977) used her theory of the structure of dominance to assert the notion of the relatedness between class and educational outcomes. With the use of critical and conflict theories as analytical tools, this research has further emphasized the complexity of the interrelationship among education, class, race and gender that is still in existence today in our society.

CHAPTER 9

REFLECTIONS AND STUDENTS' RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of students are falling into the chasms of failure in our current education system although there are numerous reforms to the curriculum. The students at risk need a voice to express themselves in creative and productive ways or else the creative energy that they have will be used in negative and destructive ways. I have written the stories of the students in social affairs schools because this medium allows for exposure to voices in the form of written narratives. Each student in this project was given a voice - an opportunity to be heard and to tell his/her story about school success in Chapter seven. The multiple voices in Chapter eight appeared to have spoken in unison on many factors that emerged from this investigation. Most of the concerns raised by the students have previously been articulated in many educational debates. For example, one of the most important factors that surfaced is the students' view of school success. Students' in social affairs schools view of success is consistent with that of the general public. Like the functionalists, they "believe" that if they work hard in school they will receive good grades and will be successful. They appear to know what school success is, and like most students they too want to be successful.

However, these students are experiencing difficulty in achieving success in school. The students perceive the notion of school as embodying all opportunities for success, yet achieving success through the meritocratic process is outside of their experience. So dissonance is set up in what these students believe school "ought to be" and the reality of their lived experiences. They are cognizant of the constraints

placed on them – some of which were discussed in Chapter two of this thesis. Therefore, for the students in this study, school success is dependent on more than what is presently available in the monolithic structure that exists.

The students have cited some areas of the school environment that need to be adjusted in order to facilitate their success. Most of the areas cited by the students are in accordance with various factors within social transformation and reproductive theories. The students mentioned many factors that militate against their success in public schools. They spoke of the boredom they experience in school because of the way the curriculum is forced on them, while their interests are ignored and disrespected. They spoke of not understanding the framework of the school because it is outside of their experience. The views that these students expressed are not unreasonable, neither are they new. Embedded in critical thinking is the notion of history as an important factor in one's education. Consequently, schools are criticized for omitting the lived experiences of some children while emphasizing others. The structure of the school is also of concern to sociologists in education who hold the views of critical theory. Gramsci (1971) advanced the notion of hegemony as a means of social control. Such a control is used in schools to limit poor and minority students in the involvement of their learning and thereby from experiencing school success (McLaren, 1994). Interactionists (Woods, 1983; Keddie, 1971) and critical theorists (Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1970; Apple, 1993) have emphasized the importance of involving students in their learning if successful outcomes are to be achieved. Conversely, critical thinkers in education warned that lack of students' involvement in

their learning can contribute to school alienation and dropout (Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1970; Gramsci, 1971; Giroux, 1981; Bennett and LeCompte, 1995).

The students also told stories of not taking with them to school the needed knowledge to navigate the foreign waters of the classroom. Here the students refer to their lack of cultural capital as is advanced by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977). The students expressed concerned about the disconnect that exists between public school teachers and themselves. They spoke of teachers who maintained a distance that bordered on indifference – they (teachers) didn't care about them. Teachers who didn't care about the various aspects of their lives, their personal values and their future; but whose major concern was to teach the curriculum to those students who were able to fit in to the structure. They spoke of their feeling of being unwanted in school, not belonging to the school environment and their feeling of alienation from school. Again, interactionists, point to the negative impact such relationships can have on students. Most of all, the students spoke about their lack of involvement in their learning – their lack of having a voice and of not being heard. They expressed their feelings of being powerless in their effort to succeed in school. Hence, they lost the joy of learning while they attended those schools and became truants.

Other factors that emerged from this study were the students' problems associated with difficult parental relationships, prejudice, divorced parents, poverty, abuse, sexual relationships, drugs, school suspensions, school failures, verbal and physical aggression and at times, homelessness. However, they have demonstrated that these problems can be overcome by education. They know the

value of education. In their view, education is the key to move away from poverty, drug dependency and some of the other problems that they have experienced. To be educated is to have a voice, but the students suggest that they have no voice. Their voices have been silenced. Therefore, they have made some recommendations with the hope that their plea for involvement in their learning will be heard and acted upon by policy makers in education.

9.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Definition of school success needs to include an appreciation of all spheres of student learning – not only academics. The incremental stages of success should be acknowledged as a form of encouragement for students – especially those who are experiencing difficulties in school.
- Public schools are now operating under the banner of inclusivity, therefore programs should be available to meet the varying needs and interests of their clientele. The students would like to be able to work at their own pace in academic courses. They would also like to have some vocational courses and courses in the arts offered in high school.
- School personnel in public schools should learn to listen to students and involve them in the planning process of their education.
- Students would like teachers to show that they do care about them. They do not connect with public school teachers and this factor impedes their learning. They want to have more interaction with teachers in the classroom, instead of sitting and listening to lectures.
- Students at risk need to be encouraged to succeed instead of being “pushed out” when they are struggling.
- Make school fun. Make school interesting. Fun is allowing students to be involved. The students would like to be able to participate in class discussions and have their lived experiences validated. They would like to have positive interaction with members of the school community so that they can perceive themselves as an integral part of that community.

- Students from social affairs schools should be first discharged to alternative schools and not regular public schools. However, should a student be reintegrated into a public school immediately he or she is discharged, a special effort should be made between the receiving school and the agency for appropriate accommodation of this student. For usually at this stage of these young people's lives, they are still ill equipped to cope with large schools and rigid rules without a lot of support.
- Reduce class size in public high schools. This will be beneficial to both students and teachers. In the long run it will be most cost effective.
- Eliminate school suspension because it deprives students of their time in school and does not serve as a deterrent.

The students did not offer any concrete suggestions regarding keeping students in school so that they do not drop out. They argued that the law allows students to leave school when they are sixteen years old. So there is not much that can be done to keep students if they are not enjoying school and want to leave. However, the general consensus from the students is that if school offered programs that they liked, and if they were allowed to actively participate in their learning then students would not be bored. As a result, more students would stay in school and fewer of them would drop out.

But the students' collective voice is significant to the body of literature that presently exists on the tenacious problem of high school dropout. The students' combined stories, life histories and school experiences have offered a typology of this type of students. These are the students who are at-risk of leaving school prematurely and in this project they have offered recommendations to different levels of authorities to help in abating the dropout problem. In so doing, they have informed us of their perception of school success and the help they need to achieve school success. They have informed us of curriculum and pedagogical needs. If

these students' needs are to be considered then all stakeholders in education must be involved with the recommendations they made as curriculum policies and implementation are addressed.

A curriculum policy defines what students should learn in the various subject areas. It is the prescribed plan of study for each grade that is "officially" sanctioned by the Ministry of Education in each province in Canada. Hence, each classroom teacher is accountable to it. Within this broad framework teachers are expected to make specific decisions about what is taught which allows them to choose a variety of teaching and learning materials (Werner, 1987:91).

The development of a curriculum is complex for it involves various concerns of technical, ethical, and experiential factors. That is one of the reasons I argue that the dropout phenomenon is a complex one because there are so many factors that impact on students – positively and negatively. The most salient feature of the curriculum development is its value dimension (Apple, 1983). The content is selected from a wide range of available knowledge. The selection is made on the basis of what someone deems to be important. Central to this activity are questions of value. For example what knowledge is of most value for students? What content should be taught and learned? For whom is this content important? What purpose does the content serve – to the students and the society (Anderson and Tomkins, 1983)?

As an inevitable consequence of the value attached to the content in the public schools' curriculum, its development is usually characterized by dispute (Orpwood, 1978), because not everyone agrees on the same educational priorities.

Dissimilar value positions usually lead to differing prescriptions for educational content. The difficulty, as Apple (1983) points out, is that “schools serve as arenas in which various groups will do battle for differing conceptions of what the society should value” (p. 322). The students in this study are stakeholders in education and they are disputing the school curriculum that one teacher describes as “the domain of classical college” (Teacher interviewed, 1999). According to the students’ stories, such a curriculum does not hold much interest or meaning for most of them.

Werner (1987) suggests that in an ideal situation the conflict over value in the curriculum could be resolved through research and rational discussion, but the dispute is a political one. Throughout this thesis the impact of political involvement in education as presented by proponents of reproduction theory (Gramsci, 1971; Persell, 1977; Apple, 1983; Althusser, 1972 among others) has been discussed. Generally, it has been argued that public debate provides the opportunity for the value question to be clarified and for various answers to be justified or resolved by making suitable adjustments. However, when consensus is not possible (or desired in most cases) among groups committed to extending or protecting their own agendas, the conflict is resolved through power. In this context power refers to the ability of a group or individual to influence others, or more directly, to make decisions to resolve the struggle over the value issues. Anyone who has access to curriculum decision or to textbook selection has the power to define the knowledge, values and attitudes that are to be preferred within schools serving a diverse population of students (Werner, 1987: 92).

But every group does not have equal access to the decision making process. Opponents of critical, interpretive and conflict theories have argued that groups or individuals that have access to decision making are placed in positions of privilege in society. Conversely, those without power are voiceless and marginalized. As indicated in the students' stories, they and their parents are not in positions of power, so for the most part they are absent from the debate. So their views are not heard. That is the reason I listened to them and heard their preferences, needs and desires. Hopefully, through the medium of this research paper the decision-makers and other stakeholders in education will hear their views.

As well as the curriculum development, the students also spoke of the implementation of the curriculum in school. Teaching and learning materials play a major role in the implementation of the curriculum policy (Persell, 1977). It is the teacher who interprets the policy, selects the materials and implements the curriculum (Giroux, 1988). The curriculum implementation is usually shaped by the teacher expectation of his/her students. Hence, if a teacher believes that certain students cannot succeed academically because they are lazy, "dumb" or uninterested in schoolwork it legitimizes the way the teacher implements the curriculum (Anyon, 1990). Concern for teaching materials begs to ask the question regarding how they will be used and what parts of the content will be emphasized or neglected. For example, the way in which the history of Native Peoples in Canada is taught and the neglect of the history of Blacks in Canadian schools. Consequently, any discussion of the materials used in classrooms is incomplete without considering the teacher who selects, interprets and uses them (Keddie,

1971). The teachers' decision largely defines students' learning opportunities (Woods, 1983). The students talked about the lack of validation of their lived experiences by teachers, which compounded their alienation from school.

The teachers' preferred style pedagogical style also impacts on the implementation of the content (Hargreaves, 1984). Teachers who prefer student inquiry usually emphasize those topics that involve projects and group work. Most of the students in this study, claimed that working on projects and in groups were their preferred style of learning. However, their clamour for change went unnoticed and unheeded. Unfortunately, for the students, they were usually placed in classes where the teachers preferred a direct teaching style by relying heavily on one text and reinforcing its content through controlled classroom activities, homework assignments and tests. It is no wonder the students blame teachers in public schools for their failure. One should not neglect the importance of students' expectations. As demonstrated by Dewey, Freire, Woods, Giroux, Keddie, among others, students are not merely passive recipients who absorb the information and values transmitted to them. They too, are involved in the interaction of school. As integral parts of the interactional process, they interpret school knowledge, making sense of it through their own history, experiences, interests, values and abilities. In analysing the students' stories, one concludes that the curriculum and the implementation of the curriculum are in direct opposition to these students' expectations.

In light of the present education reform in Quebec, the students' perception of public schools and the chance they have of success is an important assessment.

The Quebec school system started a process of education reform in the secondary-school system (2002-2003) emphasizing basic education during the first cycle. The practical, hands-on courses including Home Economics, Introduction to Technology and Exploratory Vocational Education will cease to exist as officially sanctioned courses (Gouvernement du Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, 1997). Herein lies one of the major problems for students in this study and others like them. The students spoke about inclusion of their history, experiences and vocational courses that they would like to see in the curriculum. The stories they told emphasized how much they enjoyed gym, sports, woodworking, arts, auto-mechanics and introduction to technology. One student mentioned the sheer delight he experienced in his home economic classes as he learned to cook a variety of dishes from different countries. These stories show that practical, hands-on courses engaged them in learning in a variety of ways. According to Gardner (1983), students with tactile and kinesthetic intelligence need to be included in any school program if all students are to be successful. The elimination of practical courses in the high schools in Quebec surely is a contradictory notion to the government's slogan of "Success for all." "Let's not be surprised when this round of reform results in more dropouts" (Gradwell, 2002).

9.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The limitations of this study rest with the following factors: absence of statistical data, involvement of one specific population of high-risk students and difficulty in replicating it. First, the analysis is devoid of statistical data and this impedes generalization. Although the study was not meant to be generalized results from it can be used to develop suitable programs for all students who are at risk of dropping out, and not only students who are in social affairs schools.

Second, this research was centered on examining the students in three English social affairs schools. Therefore, students who attend social affairs schools in the French sector did not have an opportunity to express their views in this study. With the high dropout rate at over sixty- percent in some French school boards in Montreal, further investigation into the issue of students' perception of school success should be conducted in French social affairs schools. The results from this study should prove to be invaluable.

Third, the study will not be easily replicated because the population was drawn from a specific group of students who are very transient. The student body is in constant flux and this has important implication for a researcher when working with groups of students who may not be willing to cooperate. The cooperation of the students is closely linked with the personality of the interviewer and how the interviews are conducted. The students have to be extremely comfortable with the interviewer before they speak with him or her. Conducting a research of this nature with this population could prove difficult for anyone who is ill at ease with students in social affairs schools.

As a teacher who has worked in the field of special education for many years, I was able to bring certain strengths to this project. My experience afforded me the opportunity to have some knowledge of the “culture” of potential high school dropouts. I believe that this knowledge was able to help lay the foundation for validating the interview process. I am familiar with students in “special settings,” and I’m able to understand them within the context of their language and behaviour.

Since Batshaw Youth and Family Centres constantly assesses its clinical and educational services for the purposes of improvement, the conditions that existed when this study was conducted may no longer be in place for replicating it.

Despite its limitations, this research is very important because it has established the importance of listening to students who are at risk of dropping out of school. It has also reinforced previous findings that the lives of some students are interwoven in the complex web of social, economical and institutional factors that militate against school success. It has also emphasized the contradiction and confusion the various factors have caused in the life of students as they appear to believe one view but live and experience the direct opposite in schools. The combination of educational theories used as a framework for the analysis of this study is very helpful in demonstrating the complexity of both the students’ lives and their narratives. But such an analysis also informs us that by listening to the students’ stories we can gain a comprehensive and holistic insight into their lives and experiences. The information that the students offer through their narratives can be used in schools to benefit them, for in these stories they have explained what their needs are for them to experience school success.

The students' collective ideas on how they can stay in school can be used to develop suitable programs that take into consideration their abilities, interest and social location. Such programs may indeed help to change the students' school experiences from failure to success, thereby increasing their desire to stay in school and not to drop out. Although the students did not suggest a specific program and it is outside the scope of this research to do so, the data collected from this study can be used to develop suitable programs for these and other students.

Furthermore, this project will reassure parents, members of the business community, administrators, policy-makers and governments that the high rate of school dropouts need not continue to be a problem much further into the twenty-first century. With cuts in education budgets, it is time that educators look at the delivery of service from the client's point of view when developing programs. As mentioned earlier, in the past educators and government have developed programs based on studies that did not take the clients' point of view into consideration and therefore have failed, as supported by the consistency of the high rate of high school dropouts. I believe that the study which I have done should be of interest to parents, members of the business community, teachers, other educators, administrators, and politicians who are desperately searching for answers to the crucial problem of high school dropout.

9.3 CONCLUSION

The findings of this study are consistent with much of the existing literature, but they were able to add to the present body of knowledge regarding students in social affairs schools and their view of school success. The narrative approach gave significant attention to the students' voices and has allowed the students who are at risk of dropping out of high school to be heard. They articulated the problems that beset them in schools and have made suggestions about how the identified problems may be resolved. The results of the study indicate that when all stakeholders are involved in the planning process of school programs, both the delivery and reception of services have a better chance of operating at maximum. But more importantly, the study emphasizes the complexity of the dropout problem and the contradictory forces in school that impact on the life of some students. The contradiction between their experiences in school and what they think school "ought to be" is reflected in their narratives. Consequently, to truly understand the needs of the students it is imperative to listen to them.

In this study, the students have indicated that they want to experience school success and they want to graduate from high school. But they are concerned that there are major blocks in their path towards achieving these goals. Until the blocks of inadequate class size, unsatisfactory programs and the lack of involvement in their learning are lifted, then these students will continue to struggle and drop out of school. The present education reform (1997) suggests that there is a paradigm shift from access to success. But in reality this seems to be a contradictory notion, for all students do not have access to the programs that will satisfy their needs to make them

successful in school. Therefore, it is incumbent on schools to extend the curriculum to include students' history, experiences and other worldviews to the present one so that all students can be included.

Most students said that they benefited from the programs in social affairs schools. In these programs, they were able to experience some form of academic success and learned some social and vocational skills. These experiences raised the level of their self-esteem and gave them a sense of self worth. In these schools, students feel that they are usually treated with respect by the adults who work with them, and that has also helped to increase their confidence in themselves. Kulka, Mann and Klingel (1977) suggested that, "Congruence between student and learning environment is likely to produce positive outcomes – including increased self-worth, well-being and involvement as well as the absence of psychological strain and maladaptive behaviour" (p. 31).

But, in spite of the positive impact that the teacher culture of this type of school has on these students and the programs that are designed to enhance their learning, for the most part, the students view their education as being compromised. They indicated that their schooling is abnormal because when they are discharged from social affairs schools, they have difficulty in adjusting to the rigour and expectations of life in public schools. In the public school system, they are not given special attention and are expected to cope like everyone else. Making the adjustments to life in public schools is quite challenging for them and so they give up on school and frequently drop out. Another major problem for the students who attend social affairs schools is that sometimes their friends do not attend these

schools, so they see themselves as being “different” from their friends. One student said: “I’d rather stay in the public school and fail than stay in a Bo-Bo School. Everybody knows that this is a Bo-Bo School!”

In our society, students in these schools are labeled as “System Kids.” No elite status is conferred on any of these students when they are re-integrated into the public school, leave the social affairs school for whatever reason, or drop out of school. Unfortunately, in this society, social affairs schools are frequently seen as “dumping grounds” for every conceivable misfit and academically incompetent youth. As I defended my application to study the students in social affairs schools, one school board administrator advised me not to waste my time, “ for these kids are criminals and are in jail. These schools are jails.” These schools, sadly, are widely viewed as places where nice people and bright students do not go. Therefore, this labeling and stigmatizing seem to erase the hard work of teachers and the support staff. For in the final analysis, the students leave feeling stigmatized, labeled and immersed in a culture of continuous failure.

From my point of view, it appears that social affairs schools have provided the atmosphere and programs that are conducive to learning for the students in their care. However, the general perception of these schools has been quite negative, and so through no fault of their own they have still failed to render adequate help where it is most needed in education. I suggest then that if these students are to continue to experience school success after they leave social affairs schools, they need to be included into the public school system. Consequently, it is crucial for the court, the agency and the receiving public schools to work together with

discharged students to make the transition from one institution to the other easier. For it is incumbent on all who are charged with the welfare of these students to put in place mechanisms that will ensure a continuation of school success that they enjoyed in social affairs schools. With the present education trend in inclusive education, these students will be well served in a very supportive environment within the public school system.

At the end of the interviews I was quite touched by the students' expressed desire to experience school success and graduate from high school, but I wondered how many of them would be able to achieve this goal in the present educational system. This study has highlighted the plight of students who are at risk of dropping out of high school, and who do not learn effectively in the structure of the public school system. It has called to attention the public schools' responsibility to urgently respond to students who need to be physically active, who learn only through having direct experience and who resent authority and rigid structures.

The study has also called to question the provisions made for learning experiences in schools; the domination over attendance and duration as measures of quality learning; having to be physically present in class as the sole means of learning; the requirement for every student to use the same text and write a common exam for any given course, and the requirement for every student to finish a course at the same time.

Although recommendations cannot be made in this dissertation for specific programs to benefit school retention, the results of the study have issued a challenge. The challenge from the results of this study to those concerned with

educational policy and administration is to enlarge the vision of the public school education system beyond the monolithic structure of the industrial era to the present knowledge-based period. One of the ways to achieve this transition is to listen to those students who are at risk of dropping out of high school. Other ways to achieve such a transition perhaps could include shorter school weeks, more independent projects, or internships as requirement for high school graduation. Or perhaps, there could be encouragement of different types of learning, such as independent study and team projects. Maybe students who can learn independently and quickly and obtain objectives could be encouraged to do so, thereby maintaining their interest in learning and creating space for those students who do not learn as quickly.

In this study the students have spoken. Postman (1995) has argued that we create histories and future for ourselves through the medium of narratives. "Without a narrative life has no meaning, without meaning, learning has no purpose. Without purpose, schools are houses of detention not attention" (p. 7). The complexity of the students' narratives has been emphasized and this has underscored the reason the high school dropout is such a complex one.

My view is that the idea of public schools should depend on the existence of shared narratives and the exclusion of narratives that lead to exclusion, alienation and divisiveness. If the students' voices are not heeded then this society will continue to pay an astronomical cost for special education professionals, prisons, social assistance, and lost revenue. Furthermore (according to Callan, 1996), if schools persist in ignoring students' voices they will be guilty of committing a

moral offence. For when schools ignore students' voices they disable them from developing their interests, and extinguish interest that may even have begun to bloom in them. This in itself represents a fundamental lack of respect for students and a moral failure for schools. The stifled creativity of students results in a tremendous loss to those individuals as it does to society. The results of this study signal a call for attention to be given to students' voices as they seek to be involved in their learning, for they know what they need to experience school success.

At this juncture, I join Peshkin (1993) in the belief that "no research paradigm has a monopoly on quality. None can deliver promising outcomes with certainty. None has the grounds for positing any design, procedures, and anticipated outcomes as gospel truth" (p. 28). But Peshkin (1993) also posits that many types of good results are the fruits of qualitative research. For me, it is the exemplification, not categorization I seek in doing this research. In so doing, I have avoided a too-limited, conventional focus on theory-driven, hypothesis testing and generalization-producing perspective. This statement should in no way be interpreted as being pejorative, for it is only an effort to place the research methodology I have selected for my project within a broader framework of qualitative inquiries in education.

Finally, with regards to the progressive, procedural nature of research, I value Vidich and Bensman's (1968) conclusion that "at best, [the researcher]...can feel that he has advanced his problem along an infinite path...there is no final accumulation and no final solution" (p. 396). So then, the journey that I took to unravel the "secrets of the meaning of success" from students who are at risk of dropping out of high

school was certainly facilitated by my choice of research methodology. This methodology explicates complexity, and brings me very close to the phenomenon that I seek to illuminate. In the end, my hope is that my work was authored in such a way that the lives of students who once were at risk of dropping out of high school have been changed for the better, because someone gave them a voice. At the end of my interview with one student she remarked:

Well, I don't like talking to people. And then like this is kinda helping me because I'm getting out what I have inside that I don't do with other people. So you're helping me.

9.4 TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

The following meaning of terms and definitions are included for the benefit of readers who are unfamiliar with words used by students in social affairs schools, Quebec's boroughs, social affairs system and its education system.

B & E:	means breaking and entering into a building with the intent to steal
Bo –Bo School:	refers to social affairs schools - a colloquial term used by student to suggest that these schools are inferior to public schools
CÉGEP:	refers to Collège D'enseignement Général et Professionnel
CITÉ	refers to a youth detention centre
Chill Out:	means to take it easy or relax
Cool:	means it is O.K, or it is satisfactory
Cross Roads:	the name of a unit or living quarters in one of the residential centres
Dropout:	definition commonly used by researchers identifies a dropout as "any person who has left school for any reason prior to graduation" (Sullivan, 1988). This is the definition that is used in this project.
DYP:	refers to the Department of Youth Protection
ITT:	means Introduction to Technology – a high school vocational course
LA Lakers:	is the name of a basketball team in the NBA that is situated in Los Angeles
Literacy:	is defined by the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) as the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities, at home, at work and in the community, to achieve one's goals, and develop one's knowledge and potential
MRE:	Moral and Religious Education – a course taught in high schools in Quebec
NBA:	means National Basketball Association

NDG: refers to Notre Dame de Grâce – a municipality of Montreal

Placement: refers to an order of the court to remove children or youths from their homes and put them to live in a group home, residential centre or foster home for a specified period of time

Point, The: refers to Point St. Charles– the name of a municipality of Montreal

RDP: refers to Rivière des Prairies –a municipality of Montreal

School Success: Dei and his colleagues (1997) express the notion that the general definition of school success, is the attainment of a high school leaving diploma by a student at the end of the completion of the high school program.

The *Report of the Task Force on Curriculum Reform* (1997) defines school success as students' mastery of language of instruction and second language, mastery of the fundamentals of mathematics, knowledge of their own history, basic means of artistic expression, knowledge of science and the development of work methods.

But my definition of school success goes beyond the general view of the successful completion of the academically prescribed high school program needed for certification. Added to this, school success for me includes the individual development of students' talents and aptitudes to their fullest potential, and the ability to be productive and caring citizens of society.

But success is not constant. It changes with time and place. McElroy–Johnson's states her definition of students' success thus: "To me, successful students are those who are able to master the necessary tools, whatever they may be, to ensure their completion of high school, college, vocation school, and /or apprenticeships in order to make positive lives for themselves. Success especially involves the ability to read and write, so that students have the power of communication and the necessary proficiency for seeking

employment. Success also means students being able to navigate, in a disciplined way, within a diverse society that is sometimes hostile to them without falling apart and /or being self-destructive” (1993: 87).

- Staff: Students in social affairs schools refer to child care workers who are assigned to them as their “staff
- Students at-risk: Students at-risk is defined as those with a high probability of leaving school prematurely (Ministère du Québec, 1991). With a view to finding the cause of the dropout phenomenon, researchers identified certain characteristics of some students in school that are common to dropouts. Students in school who exhibit behaviours and have characteristics of dropouts are categorized as being “at risk” of leaving school prematurely or dropping out. In this project, students at risk of dropping out of high school are students who are characterized as being in conflict with, and disconnected from school, but who are still attending school. For the most part, these students have experienced repeated school failures, and therefore lag behind a year or two in their grade levels (Ministère du Québec, 1992).
- TMR: refers to Town of Mt. Royal - a municipality of Montreal
- Unit: units are living quarters for groups of youths in residential centres.

APPENDIX A

APPENDIX

Service Contract Between the "School Board" and the "Agency"

Whereas the ministère de la Santé et des Services Sociaux and the ministère de l'Éducation have jointly established guidelines to ensure that children in institutions under the ministère de la Santé et des Services Sociaux are educated in accordance with their highest potential and in conformity with (the) Board's policy:

The "School Board" on the one hand, hereinafter called "the Board" and represented by _____ duly authorized by resolution, dated _____, a copy of which is attached, and "the Agency" on the other hand, hereinafter called "the Institution" and represented by _____ duly authorized by resolution, dated _____, a copy of which is attached, agree to the following:

Obligations and Responsibilities of Parties

The Board

- | | |
|------------|---|
| Section 1 | The Board agrees to provide educational services for school age children in the Institution, during the school year, in accordance with policies established by the ministère de l'Éducation and the ministère de la Santé et des Services Sociaux and in accordance with the guidelines laid down for this purpose and in conformity with the Education Act. |
| Section 2 | The Board agrees to take the necessary measures to provide teaching personnel and if the specific needs of the children demand it, to obtain the appropriate supervisory or ancillary personnel once authorization is received from the ministère de l'Éducation. |
| Section 3 | The person in charge of educational services shall take into consideration the requirements of the Institution's rehabilitation program in carrying out his/her work. |
| Section 4 | The Board agrees to ensure that professionals under its jurisdiction participate in the program to provide essential support for educational services. |
| Section 5 | The Board agrees to provide educational services for the children in the Institution, whose number is to be determined annually by the joint standing committee and established in the Annexe au protocole d'entente duly approved by the ministère de l'Éducation. |
| Section 6 | In establishing the pupil-teacher ratio, the Board agrees to abide by the provisions of the teachers' collective agreement. |
| Section 7 | The Board shall maintain with the institution acting in the role of a parent, those relations usually maintained by the Board with parents. |
| Section 8 | The Board shall integrate into schools all students whose integration is recommended by the joint standing committee. |
| Section 9 | The Board shall ensure that all the students who cannot be integrated into a school are provided with educational services in areas designated for this purpose within the Institution. |
| Section 10 | The Board shall be responsible for the purchase of school supplies, regular and special teaching materials, for children receiving educational services in a school or the Institution, in accordance with the Board norms for special classes, or, if need be, with authorization from the ministère de l'Éducation. |
| Section 11 | The Board shall be responsible for the transportation of students to and from the Institution in accordance with the ministère des Transports rules and regulations. |
-

- Section 12 Capital expenditures incurred for educational services shall be the responsibility of the Board when instruction is given in a Board school.

The Institution

- Section 13 The Institution shall make provision for rehabilitation activities in accordance with the policy established by the ministère de la Santé et des Services Sociaux and in accordance with guidelines laid down for this purpose.
- Section 14 As an essential concomitant to educational services, the Institution agrees to provide health and social services and to see that medical and psycho-social evaluations are carried out, if funded by the ministère de la Santé et des Services Sociaux.
- Section 15 The Institution agrees to take the necessary measures to have its personnel work in collaboration with the Board's personnel whether educational services are provided in the school or within the Institution.
- Section 16 The Institution agrees to appoint someone to be responsible for cooperating with the Board.
- Section 17 The Institution agrees to obtain for the children such prostheses as well as aids and devices appropriate to their handicaps if funded by the ministère de la Santé et des Services Sociaux.
- Section 18 The Institution agrees to provide, without cost, the space necessary for educational services for children who are admitted to the Institution.
- Section 19 The Institution agrees to provide whatever support personnel may be needed for the transportation of the children to school, if funded through the ministère des Transports.
- Section 20 The Institution shall obtain for children in its care the school supplies for which parents would normally be responsible.
- Section 21 The Institution shall be responsible for capital expenditures incurred for educational services within the Institution, if such expenditures are authorized and funded by the ministère de la Santé et des Services Sociaux.

Joint Responsibilities

- Section 22 The Board and the Institution agree to set up a joint standing committee whose mandate shall be:
1. to cooperate in implementing the service contract;
 2. to establish selection criteria for the school integration of children in accordance with the objectives of both ministries;
 3. to suggest to the appropriate authorities ways of implementing the present norms governing all teaching and non-teaching professional staff who will be working in the school or with the Institution;
 4. to recommend to the authorities immediately concerned possible ways of ensuring better coordination of activities between the Institution and the Board;
 5. to evaluate the experience periodically and if needed recommend changes in the agreement to the authorities concerned;
 6. according to instruction, directives or circulars issued by the ministère de l'Éducation or the ministère de la Santé et des Services Sociaux or by signing parties, to determine yearly the number of pupils who are to receive educational services from the Board the following year, and to include them in the annexe au protocole;
- Section 23 The Board and the Institution agree that, within the framework of the laws governing them, they shall jointly take any measures necessary to ensure that persons who may be affected by the signing of this contract do not suffer any prejudice regarding their rights under collective agreements governing them or under administrative and salary policies concerning them.

The present contract shall become effective when it is signed by a duly authorized representative of each of the two parties and it is approved by the ministère de l'Éducation and is filed with the Conseil de la Santé et des Services sociaux de la région de Montréal métropolitain.

The contract is renewable annually on the 1st of July, unless prior to March 1st, either party gives written notice of alteration, copies of which is to be forwarded to the ministère de l'Éducation and to the Conseil de la Santé et des Services sociaux de la région de Montréal métropolitain.

The "Board" agrees to undertake the development and maintenance of the educational services in _____ subject to the undernoted conditions:

- (a) That full norm allowance (per capita) for the children involved will be paid to the "Board" by the ministère de l'Éducation.
- (b) That the costs of any capital expense incurred by the "Board" in educating these children will be reimbursed by the ministère de l'Éducation and/or the ministère de la Santé et des Services Sociaux.
- (c) That the pertinent service contracts are not causing contractual conflict or are in violation of existing syndical agreements.

APPENDIX B**STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE****Instructions**

Please write your first name only in the space provided, and fill in the information in all the other spaces on this page. When you are finished writing on this page, read the other pages and answer each question. Place a circle around the answer or answers to questions that offer you choice responses. Otherwise, please write your answers on the lines provided. Do not worry, this is not a test! Thank you very much for helping me!

STUDENT'S PERSONAL INFORMATION:

Student's Name _____

Date of Birth _____

Country of Birth _____

Sex _____

Name of School you are presently attending _____

Grade level _____

Number of sisters and brother _____

Your position among your brothers and sisters (according to age) _____

Language spoken in the home _____

Parents' country of birth: (mother) _____

(father) _____

HOME ENVIRONMENT:

1. How many times have you moved in the last five years, and how many school have you attended in those five years? Write your answer to this question in the space below.

a) moved _____ time/s b) school/s _____

2. Are you now living at home with your: (circle those that apply)

a) biological parent/s?

b) adopted parent/s?

c) foster parent/s?

d) other? (explain) _____

2. Have you ever lived in any of the following places, and for what reason? Put reason/s from Column B for each place in Column A.

Column A

1) shelter _____

2) group home _____

3) residential centre _____

4) foster home _____

5) other _____

Column B

a) skipping school regularly

b) physical/verbal aggression

c) running away from home

d) disobeying your parent/s

- e) problems with your brother/s and or sister/s
- f) problems with step-parent

4. Are you presently in placement, and if yes, for how long

- a) yes _____ b) no _____ c) duration of placement _____

5. Do you want to return home? (circle your answer)

- a) Permanently
- b) For visits only
- c) Not at all
- d) Not sure

6. Do your parents discuss with you, your: (circle those that apply)

- a) behaviour?
- b) report card?
- c) attendance?
- d) future goals?
- e) other? (explain) _____

7. When you get low grades do your parents punish you or help you?

Help (how)

Punish (how)

8. Do your parents keep close contact with your school, by: (circle those that apply)

- a) attending parent/teacher interviews regularly?
- b) discussing your school performance with your teachers?
- c) volunteering for activities?
- e) attending special functions/ceremonies?

- f) doing all of the above?
- g) doing none of the above

9. Do your parents/guardians expect you to graduate from high school?

- a) yes _____
- b) no

If yes, after high school graduation do your parents/guardians expect you to

- a) study at CEGEP?
- b) join the work force?
- c) do something else? (explain) _____

If no, when you drop out, do your parent/s expect you to: (circle the one that applies)

- a) join the work force?
- b) learn a skill/trade?
- c) be unemployed and stay at home?
- d) move out and collect social assistance?
- e) do something else? (explain) _____

10. How would you describe the relationship within your family? (circle those that apply)

- a) close/loving
- b) we seldom talk
- c) we don't get along with each other
- d) other (explain) _____

11. How do your parents relate to each other? (circle those that apply)

- a) friendly/loving
- b) fighting all the time
- c) cold

d) other (explain) _____

12. If your parents fight frequently, how do you feel when they fight?

a) hopeless

b) helpless

c) afraid

d) depressed

e) other (explain) _____

FAMILY'S LEVEL OF EDUCATION AND INCOME

13. If there are two parents in your family do both of them work outside of the home?

a) yes _____

b) no _____

If yes, are you usually left alone at home, and how do you occupy your time?

14. What type of work do your parents/guardians do outside the home?

Father _____

Mother _____

Step-father _____

Step-mother _____

Guardian/s _____

15. What level of education do your parents/guardians have?

Father _____

Mother _____

Step-father _____

Step-mother _____

Guardian/s _____

16. How often in a month does your family usually take to you to:

a) the park? (_____time/s)

b) the museum? (_____time/s)

c) restaurants? (_____time/s)

d) the theatre? (_____time/s)

e) picnics? (_____time/s)

f) visit other places (countries) during vacation? (_____time/s)

17. Do you have brothers and sisters in school now?

a) yes _____ (how many?) _____

b) no _____

If yes, do you influence each other?

a) No _____

b) yes _____ (how) _____

APPENDIX C

A GUIDE FOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

I would like to learn from you what success means to you. Which of your aspirations and abilities have been left uncovered? What are your strengths, what is important to you, and what do you need to help you to feel good about yourself? I would also like you to tell me how you feel you can be successful in school - what are some things that you need to know and do, and what are some things you feel the school ought to change in order to help you succeed?

STUDENTS' SCHOOL PROFILE AND SCHOOLING EXPERIENCES

1. How would you describe yourself as a student? As a person? (probe for students' view of themselves - helpful, smart, hardworking, happy, sad, angry, successful, friendly, etc.)
 2. Tell me about your school.
 3. What do you like or dislike about your school?
 4. How much interest do you have in being in school now?
 5. Have you ever repeated grades in school? If yes, why?
 6. What do you understand by the word "success"? Tell me what success means to you. Give me some examples to describe it.
 7. Tell me about some of the things you are good at, and at which you have been successful.
 8. Does your school help you to work towards achieving the type of success you want? Give me some examples.
 9. Tell me about some of the most important opportunities school offers you to succeed.
-

10. Do you think that the school has failed you in any way? Please share your experience with school failure/s with me.
11. What can the school do to help you succeed?
12. Do you plan to graduate from high school in the youth sector (not in adult education)? If yes, how do you plan to achieve this?
13. Tell me about how you find learning in school, and about the type of help you receive or do not receive when you are experiencing difficulties.
14. How do you deal with low grades or failure in school? Tell me about some of your experiences.
15. Do you do well in exams? Tell me about some of your experiences with exams.
16. Do you have a favourite subject? Tell me about it.
17. Describe for me if you will, the qualities of your favourite teacher/s!
18. Tell me about your relationship with the school administration.
19. Tell me about the person who has been the kindest to you in school, and outside of school.
20. Do the actions of any of the persons you just mentioned affect your decision to stay in school and graduate, or drop out?

ROLE MODELS

1. Who are your role models?
 2. In what way do your role models influence your school work? and in what way do they influence other areas of your life.
 3. Do you copy some of the behaviours of your role models? Describe them for me.
 4. Do you think that you can achieve the things your role models do and have? Tell me how you plan to do this!
-

FRIENDSHIP

1. Do you have many friends? Tell me about your friends! (probe race, ethnicity, family background, etc.)
2. Please tell me about some of the things you do when you hang out with your friends.
3. Did you choose these persons for your best friends? Describe how you met some of them.
4. How do most of your friends feel about school? (probe about desire to drop out, graduate, having difficulty, experiencing success, etc.)
5. With regards to school, tell me the type of influence your friends have on you.
6. Describe the qualities you look for in a friend.
7. Do you know anyone who has dropped out of school? If you do, can you tell me his/her story?
8. Have any of your friends ever been in placement? Tell me the reason for their placement.
9. Do you now have friends in placement ? Tell me about them.

STUDENTS' FUTURE PLANS

1. If you graduate from high school what will you do when you leave? (probe for students' future plans, e.g. higher education, learn a skill, get a job)
2. If you drop out of high school, what do you plan to do when you leave?
3. What kind of income are you planning to earn?
4. Is there a guidance counselor in your school? If there is, tell me some of the topics you discuss with him/her (probe for trust in speaking to guidance counselors about their problems and future plans).

5. Do you believe that you will be successful in school and in life?
6. What do you think school can do to bring you the kind of success you just mentioned?
7. My final question to you is, what do you think schools can do to prevent students from dropping out?

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW

GUIDE FOR SOCIAL WORKERS, CHILD-CARE WORKERS AND OTHER CARE-GIVERS

1. What does success mean to you?
 2. Would you say that you are successful?
 3. What does the term "high school dropout" mean to you?
 4. Why do you think that students dropout out of high school?
 5. What are your views on those students who dropout of high school?
 6. Do you discuss school problems with the children who are in your care?
 7. Do you think that the school experiences of the children in your care would have been different if they not in "substitute care"?
 8. Do you think that the experiences of the children in your care would have been different if they were from wealthy/poor families?
 9. Do you think that the school experiences of any of the children in your care would have been different if he/she were of another race/ethnic group?
 10. How often do you talk the teachers of these children?
 11. What do you think that teachers can do to facilitate learning for children in care?
 12. What are some of the daily experiences you go through that you think significantly impact on the schooling of children in your care?
 13. How would you describe a typical day for you?
 14. What are some of the aspirations of youth in your care? What are they saying about their plans for the future?
 15. What are some of your greatest concerns (worry) about youth in care in today's society?
-

16. In what ways school could be made more interesting for these students so that they will be more likely to graduate from high school rather than dropout?

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR TEACHERS AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

1. What is your definition of school success? As a teacher, tell me what success means to you!
 2. What are your views about students who are failing in school and are potential dropouts?
 3. How do you view those students who drop out?
 4. How would you describe your philosophy of teaching?
 5. Please tell me about your views on how such factors as race/ethnicity/ gender and class influence education!
 6. Do you think that most students who are potential high school dropouts have different learning styles from the majority of students? If this is so, how are these learning styles facilitated in your school?
 7. Describe your greatest challenge in teaching students who are potential dropouts!
 8. In your view, what should be done to keep students in school?
 9. Do you think that students who appear most likely to dropout, bring any special contribution to the school? If they do, tell me about them!
 10. Are there any changes the school ought make to improve the learning of students who are potential dropouts?
 11. Describe some of the measures taken in your school towards dropout prevention!
 12. Why do you think that the dropout rate is still so high in Quebec?
 13. What do you think is the most essential factor necessary to combat the high school dropout problem?
 14. Describe your experience of a typical day at school!
-

-
15. Why did you choose this career and what are some of the special attributes you bring to your job?
 16. Please describe your general view of the present school system!
 17. Do you think that students who are potential dropouts can be successful in the present school structure and with the programme now offered? Give me your views!
 18. Finally, are you happy in your job? Is there anything you would change to make it better?
-

APPENDIX F



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3700 McTavish Street
Montreal, PQ, Canada H3A 1Y2

Faculté des sciences de l'éducation
Université McGill
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Faculdade de Educação
Universidade McGill
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Montréal, PQ, Canada H3A 1Y2

QUESTIONNAIRE AND INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Dear Parent/s,

I am a Ph.D. student at McGill University. I am working on a research project which involves interviewing students from Grades Seven to Ten. My interest is to learn about students' perception of school success, and to hear their views on how teaching and learning in public high schools can increase student retention, and reduce the dropout rate.

For this reason, I am requesting your permission to allow your son/daughter to complete a questionnaire with his/her homeroom teacher. I am also asking your permission to conduct an interview with your child at his/her school. I wish to assure you that all information obtained from this project will be strictly confidential. I plan to use a tape-recorder to record our conversations. However, should this prove to be of concern to you, I will avoid doing it. Since participation in this project is voluntary, your son/daughter has the right to withdraw at any time should he/she wishes to do so.

Kindly check the appropriate box on the attached sheet and return the signed portion to your child's teacher. Should you have any questions please feel free to contact me at (514) 482-9645. Your cooperation will be greatly appreciated. Thanks again!

Yours truly,

J. M. Gordon
Ph.D. Student

Kindly complete this permission slip and return it to your child's homeroom teacher.

1. I give my child permission to complete the questionnaire. Yes () No ()
2. I give permission for my child to be interviewed. Yes () No ()
3. I give permission for the interview to be recorded. Yes () No ()

Name of child.....

Signature of Parent/Guardian.....

Date.....

--

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