Grade Nine Teachers’ Perception of How Teachers, Parents, Peers, Administrators, and Community Members Affect the Development of the Grade Nine Student

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine grade nine teachers' perception of how teachers, parents, peers, administrators, and community members influence the overall development of grade nine students. Ten grade nine teachers (four male and six female) participated in the study which consisted of the completion of a one hour, tape-recorded interview.

The central findings were as follows: 1) the grade nine student has evolved; 2) peers have an important impact on the four developmental areas (physical, emotional, social, and academic) of the grade nine student; and 3) the role of the grade nine teacher appears to have dramatically changed over the last seventeen years.

Suggestions and recommendations for future research in this field are based on findings related to the enhancement of the secondary school experience for the grade nine adolescent.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

According to Csikszentmihalyi and Larson (1984) and Luke and Sinclair (1991), adolescence is the most important period of life. Two significant transitional phases may occur between the years twelve to eighteen. The first transition is a progression from child to adult which requires an adjustment in the adolescent's growth, development, and level of maturity. The second transition is a shift from elementary to secondary school. This transition, according to the Ministry of Education (1990), requires that the adolescent adjust to new friends and classmates, new teachers, rules and routines, an unfamiliar environment, a different school organization, and new instructional programs.

These two transitional phases of adolescent development may be responsible for the physical, emotional, social, and academic struggles endured by the grade nine student (Ministry of Education, 1990). Physical, emotional, social, and academic development are interconnected areas which are vital to the adolescent's growth and maturity. Each of these developmental areas influence the adolescent's behavior. Likewise, each area may be influenced by many external factors such as: teachers, parents, peers, administrators and community members, school structure, school culture, and/or popular media. Although each of the external factors can affect adolescent development in different ways, this study focuses on the first five external factors mentioned.

The first influencing external factor is the classroom teacher. The classroom teachers has the potential to influence the grade nine student's development via
his/her method and style of instruction. For example, a perceptive teacher may adjust his/her teaching style in response to the transforming needs of adolescents. Whereas a non-perceptive teacher may instruct through methods which do not take into account the differing needs of students.

Parents are the second influencing external factor. Parents continue to have an impact on the adolescent's development through the establishment of specific goals and long-term values. However, according to Takanishi (1993), the transition from child to adult includes an evolutionary stage in which the adolescent lessens his/her dependency on his/her parents.

Peers are the third influencing external factor. Peers have a strong affect on the physical, emotional, social, and academic development of the adolescent. Peers tend to influence the adolescent's viewpoint regarding fashion, entertainment, sexuality, academics, and common interests (Fasick, 1984; Cohen, 1976; Urberg, 1992).

The fourth influencing external factor is the administrator. Administrators affect the adolescent's development by introducing new educational programs and academic regulations (e.g., destreaming).

Finally, community members are the fifth external factor that influence an adolescent's development. Often community members shape the delivery of education, from elementary to secondary school. In most locales, community members have an opportunity to voice opinions (Ministry of Education, 1990) when curriculum changes, when budgets are revised, and when staffing changes
are made. This may be accomplished in several ways including: how parents counsel their children (Greenberg, Siegel, & Leitch, 1983), parent-teacher conferences, research studies, parents' initiative to volunteer, and through public evaluation (Eccles & Midgley, 1990).

Teachers, parents, peers, administrators, and community members can affect the physical, emotional, social, and academic development of the grade nine student. The present study will investigate how these factors affect the transitional phases of the grade nine adolescent. Particular attention will be given to the role of the grade nine teacher and the importance of teacher training.

Statement of the Problem:

The present study examined the grade nine teachers' perception of how teachers, parents, peers, administrators, and community members influence the development of the grade nine student. Of particular interest was the enhancement of the secondary school experience for students at the grade nine level.

Operational Definitions:

For the purpose of this study, essential terms are defined as follows:

1) Adolescence: a period of transition from child to adult (Davis, 1985).

2) Peers: individuals who are about the same age and maturity level (Santrock, 1990).

3) Development: an increase in growth and/or maturity (Funk & Wagnalls, 1989).
4) Academic Development: the ability to show improvement or enhancement of one's intellectual abilities (Steinberg & Darling, 1994).

5) Emotional Development: the ability to express one's feelings, opinions, and/or beliefs (Zimbardo, 1985).

6) Physical Development: observable maturation and growth of the body (Coleman, 1980).

7) Social Development: the ability to interact with other individuals in a manner accepted by society (Zimbardo, 1985).

8) Elementary Education: a division of education which is junior kindergarten to grade six (Ministry of Education, 1990).

9) Secondary Education: a division of education which is grade nine to OAC (Ministry of Education, 1990).

10) Transition: a) a change from elementary school (junior kindergarten to grade eight) to secondary school (grade nine to OAC) (Cole, 1993).

11) Destreaming: students of mixed abilities are placed into one class with one curriculum of instruction for all students (Mootial, 1992).

12) Streaming: students are separated into groups based on their academic abilities (i.e., basic, general, advanced) (Mootial, 1992).
Limitations:

This study possesses several limitations. First, this study examined the perceived effect of five factors on the development of the grade nine student: 1) teachers, 2) administrators, 3) parents, 4) peers, and 5) community members. Second, the interview tool for this study was limited to twenty questions which explored the effect of the five factors on the development of the grade nine student. Although the questionnaire consisted of twenty questions, it provided an extensive amount of information. Third, the sample for this study consisted of ten teachers who were instructing at the grade nine level. Therefore, one must be cautious not to make generalizations from the data. Finally, due to the personal and professional schedules of the participants, availability of the participants and interview facilities were limited.

Delimitations:

The following delimitations were incorporated into the study in order to reduce the impact of the limitations. According to the literature reviewed (Cole, 1993; Coleman, 1980; and Parson, cited in Fasick, 1984), the five factors chosen for the study (teachers, parents, peers, administrators, community members) have an effect on and are critical to the grade nine student’s development.

The twenty interview questions were chosen to discriminate between the perceived individual and combined effects that the five factors may have on the grade nine student’s development. Secondary questions were added in order to
expand upon the primary questions, to assist the flow of the interview, and to enhance the researcher's understanding of the participants' responses. Due to time constraints and the availability of the participants during the school day, interviews had to be limited to approximately one hour. For example, some interviews took place during the lunch hour or during a teacher's free period. The interviews were then transcribed and analyzed.

Finally, the ten participants for this study were selected according to their availability as well as their teaching experience. The selected teachers had completed a minimum of five years teaching at the grade nine level (one year is equivalent to teaching a grade nine course for ten months; one course for the ten month period or two courses for five months each). They were also teaching at the grade nine level at the time of the interview. As well, due to the small number of participants, one must be cautious regarding any generalizations that may be conceived from the data.

**Rationale:**

Due to its physical, emotional, social, and academic characteristics, the transitional phase of adolescence has been recognized as a time of developmental turmoil (Eccles & Midgley, 1990). Studies conducted by Harter, Whitesell, and Kowalski (1992) and Eccles and Midgley (1990) showed that it is the developmental transition to adolescence and to secondary school that causes a decrease in academic success, an increase in school drop-out rates, and an increase in substance abuse. These studies provide evidence of the
need to examine which factors influence the development of the grade nine student.

The grade nine teacher has the potential to create an important impact on the success of the adolescent's physical, social, emotional, and academic development. In fact, the grade nine teacher must be competent in dealing with students who are affected by a variety of internal and external factors (Mootial, 1992). The teacher must be prepared to teach material in a manner which will facilitate learning for students and increase their motivation within the academic environment. As such, examining the perception of grade nine teachers is critical to the theme of this study.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Some individuals believe that the primary goal of education is to ensure that students develop in a positive manner physically, socially, emotionally, and academically (Mootial, 1992). This goal is often hindered during students' transition from elementary to secondary school. As revealed in the literature, the transition to a new grade and a new school may have effects on all students (Harter et al., 1992; Cole, 1993; Coleman 1980). Hence, the present paper will review the grade nine teacher's perception of how teachers, parents, peers, administrators, and community members influence the development of grade nine students. This information may help to develop an understanding of the experiences of grade nine students and provide suggestions which could enhance the quality of such experiences.

Transition from Elementary to Secondary School

It is recognized that there are drastic differences in the environmental structure of elementary and secondary schools (Harter et al., 1992). According to Cole (1993), the elementary school experience is more integrative and holistic than the secondary school experience. For example, students in some elementary schools are grouped in classes of heterogeneous skill and ability level. Cole (1993) proposes that the elementary curriculum is student-oriented, active, and integrated while the secondary school experience tends to be segmented and divided. There are subject-specific teachers at the secondary level, a factor which contributes to departmentalization and bureaucracy. In
addition, the secondary school is less personal. It is more evaluative, more academically competitive, and more open to comparison between students (Cole, 1993).

According to Eccles and Midgley (1990) the elementary school experience differs from the secondary experience. The secondary level of education is impersonal, there is a decrease in positive teacher-student relations, and the student must be capable of his or her own self-management. Also, the secondary school is much larger in structure and population, thus contributing to an increased social network. The larger social network forms a sharp and sudden challenge for the grade nine student attempting to find a social niche (Harter et al., 1992). The student is also trying to fulfill his or her mission to succeed in school and to be accepted by peers.

In order to enhance the positive aspects of the initial transition year into secondary school, Fasick (1988) suggests that there should be an attempt to decrease the academic competition, decrease the public comparison, and increase positive student-teacher relations to provide more meaningful educational experiences to grade nine students. This may be accomplished through the development of new programs and schemes devised by teachers and administrators. In other words, the most favorable scenario would be to establish a learning environment which maintains the best qualities of the elementary school with the strengths of a secondary school (Sklarz, 1982). Several factors may contribute to the establishment of a positive climate for
learning at the secondary level. The most important factor influencing students who are in transition from elementary to secondary school may be the teacher. In the following section, the role of the teacher during the grade nine transition year will be examined.

**Teachers:**

Research by Eccles and Midgley (1990) reveals that some secondary school teachers feel less effective than elementary school teachers. Britzman (1991) has shown that the work of secondary school teachers is often defined by their subject specialization thus, many individuals believe that what teachers do reflects what teachers are (Pearce & Pickard, 1987). This may not always be the case. Individuals who are learning to teach must develop knowledge in the subject area as well as the ability to present the knowledge in a satisfactory fashion. Although knowledge in a subject area may be important, it may also be necessary for educators to take the time to understand their students' stages of development, abilities, and attitudes (Gibson & Chandler, 1988). Teachers also need to understand the factors which mold their students' personality. It must be realized that there is more for teachers to know than the subject matter alone -- students are never simply learners. A teacher who is confident in his or her teaching abilities may be more apt to gain an understanding of his or her students.

Britzman (1991) suggests that teachers are judged by themselves and others through their ability and their success to cope with the struggle for
Some individuals believe that "unless the teacher establishes control, there will be no learning" (Britzman, 1991, p. 223). Control may be viewed here as self-confidence. Teachers who are confident about their abilities may be more likely to be successful in the classroom. Confident teachers may be more willing to try new ideas, more competent in using instructional strategies which are powerful and difficult to acquire, and may also be more capable of involving parents in school activities (Ross, McKeiver, & Hogaboam-Gray, 1994).

The quality of school learning is dependent on the quality of teachers. In fact, it is a possibility that the quality of education programs may not be improved without improving the quality of the teachers delivering them. Bibby and Posterski (1992) believe that teachers are in the best position to help students enjoy their educational experiences. As Gibson and Chandler (1988) suggest, the more research-derived knowledge given to teachers, the more dramatically their performance will be improved. Consequently, better prepared teachers may be in a stronger position to assist grade nine students during their transitions.

**Transition From Child to Adolescent**

The second recognized transitional phase that the grade nine student experiences is the progression from child to adult. During this section, how the external factors influence the four areas (physical, social, emotional, and academic) of adolescent development will be discussed. Socially, the grade nine student encounters opposite gender relationships and peer group
interactions. Academically, the influence of teachers, parents, and peers is reviewed. Physically, the adolescent encounters changes in his/her self-concept and rate of maturation. Finally, emotional dependency and/or lack of dependency on teachers, parents, and peers is reviewed.

According to Davis (1985), adolescence is the period of transition from child to adult. During this transitional period, young individuals are provided with many opportunities to enhance their development to fully functional and capable individuals, especially in the areas of maturity, independence, emotional stability, intelligence, attitude, and social relationships (Twiford & Carson, 1980). Luke and Sinclair (1991) also believe that this transitional period is a time when personal limits are explored and lifetime attitudes and patterns of living are established. For many young people, the area of social development undergoes the most apparent and extensive evolution during the transition from child to adult.

Social Development:

Elkind (1984) describes the transition from child to adolescent as being similar to moving from one society to another, where one is suddenly exposed to new ways of thinking and behaving or, to a youth culture. This situation is very evident among grade nine students entering the secondary level of education. At this point in their education and in life, Elkind (1984) suggests that adolescents are introduced to complex multi-layered social interactions.
According to the literature, there are three levels to adolescent peer interactions: crowds, cliques, and dyads (Brown, 1989; Adams & Gullotta, 1989; Fasick, 1988). Adams and Gullotta (1989) define a crowd as being "a large group of adolescents who affiliate with one another through the identification of a common leader or idol" (p. 100). Crowds are reputation-based peer groups and members are associated by their attitudes and activities. Brown (1989) suggests that crowds usually have labels such as jocks, brainers, or nerds. A clique is composed of several adolescents who define themselves as very close friends (Adams & Gullotta, 1989). Cliques are interaction-based peer groups. Brown (1989) describes cliques as groups smaller than crowds, which consist of individuals who develop close relationships. Dyads are pairs of friends or lovers not considered peer groups.

Peer group interactions may vary in their nature, extent, and relation to the adolescent, particularly during the grade nine year. During this transition, adolescents may move from larger to smaller groups, from one group to another, or from one status to another (Fasick, 1988). It is within crowds and cliques that one begins to observe the "sports, language, music, clothing, dating, and 'hacking about' that make up the core of youth culture" (Fasick, 1988, p. 151) which is recognized by both adolescents and their parents during this transitory phase. It has also been observed that, in the transition from elementary to secondary school, crowds begin to interact, eventually forming couples or dyads.
According to Bibby and Posterski (1992), relationships are what adolescents value most. They want friends, they want positive interpersonal ties, and they want to be loved. In fact, "to some adolescents, how they are seen by peers is the most important aspect of their lives" (Santrock, 1990, p. 245). Exclusion from social groups may cause some adolescents to experience feelings of stress, frustration, and/or sadness. Peer groups include individuals who provide each other with information about the world outside the family. As a result, the new social networks of secondary school may leave grade nine students with feelings of discomfort for themselves and the world. This discomfort may be a reaction to the "emergence of opposite-sex relationships and the disruption of prior peer networks" as proposed by Simmons, Burgeson, Carleton-Ford, and Blyth (1987, p. 1232), thus inducing uncomfortable changes in the young person's attitudes and behavior (Cohen, 1976).

The emergence of opposite-sex relationships introduces the need for intimacy, the least precise and most uncertain of all adolescent impulses (Mitchell, 1975). The need for intimacy is a basic human desire which seems to dramatically influence many of the adolescent's patterns and habits, especially those habits related to close friendship and more romantic interests (Mitchell, 1975). Intimacy can be found in any form of body contact, whether a simple touch, caress, or embrace. It may also be interwoven with an impulse for sexual expression. The search for intimacy demands honesty. According to Mitchell (1975), youth who cannot extend themselves in thought or emotion may
experience an intolerable sense of incompleteness and be highly vulnerable to rejection. The pressure felt from peer groups regarding academics and social activities does not make this situation any easier.

There are curricular aspects at the secondary level of education which attempt to aid in social and personal development. It is within the atmosphere of secondary school that students, especially those in grade nine, are taught the importance of commitment to achievement. They also learn to accept certain standards and rules, and engage in independent actions (Fasick, 1988) such as fads, clubs, and cliques which help the student to construct a sense of personal identity. During this transition, the development of sexual behavior and substance use may be observed. At this point in the young person's life, an increased concern with social awareness is revealed.

Academic development:

The shift from elementary to secondary school generally shows an increase in students' social activities and a decrease in their academic confidence, competence, and motivation (Harter et al., 1992). However, Hauser, Powers, and Noam (1991) have found that during adolescence, individuals begin to show more abstract thinking techniques such as logical analysis and reflection.

A number of studies in adolescent development suggest that the family is an important influencing factor, academically, during the transition phase of adolescence (Steinberg & Darling, 1994; Coleman, 1980; Bibby & Posterski, 1992). Yet, Steinberg and Darling (1994) recommend that the position of the
adolescent within the high school network is a determinant of academic success. In fact, the authors found that the "location of an adolescent within the school's social structure is important, because peer crowd members exert an impact on school above and beyond that of the family" (p. 34). It would appear that, according to Steinberg and Darling (1994), parents have more impact on the adolescent's long-term educational goals, although peers are the most potent influence on his or her daily academic achievement.

In addition to the family, teachers are known to play a fundamental role in determining how students will progress through school. Teachers are the primary individuals required to interpret course requirements, evaluate student achievement and, to a considerable extent, reinforce a set of values regarding the importance of learning (King, 1986). Not only do teachers compete with social activities in the processes of teaching and learning but they must also overcome the physical growth problems that some of the grade nine students may be facing.

**Physical Development:**

As well as areas of concern for educators, physical growth and puberty are important areas of adolescent development. Some of the key aspects are 1) physiological effects, 2) rates of maturation such as the comparability of early and late developers, and 3) psychological consequences on self-concept and self-esteem. Coleman (1987) views these as areas of concern for educators. External pressures may, in some cases, mature a person faster, while in other
situations, these pressures may hold a person back from freedom and independence.

According to Coleman (1980), the body is radically altered in size and shape during adolescence due to growth spurts and puberty. Growth spurts cause changes in height and weight. Malina (1990) showed that during this period of transition, females are generally heavier and taller than males. However, when the male growth spurt occurs, males catch up to and eventually surpass females in body size.

Although emphasis is usually placed upon the growth spurt, other body dimensions undergo change during the transition from child to adolescent to adult. These body dimensions include skeletal and musculature appearance, facial features, and the growth of feet and hands. The onset of puberty, according to Atwater (1983), causes the culmination of the adolescent’s sexual maturation and the attainment of reproductive capabilities.

It has been revealed in the literature that, due to rapid and dramatic body changes, adolescents are vitally affected by how they feel about themselves, especially their body image (Simmons et al., 1987; Elkind, 1984; Coleman, 1980; Atwater 1983). A study by Malina (1990) shows that "individual variation in biological maturation and associated changes in size and body composition is the backdrop against which children evaluate and interpret their own growth, maturation, and social status among peers" (p. 60). In fact, Atwater (1983) found that young females are concerned with the social appeal of their appearance,
while males care about what they can do with their body. Coleman (1980) found that adolescents who are uncomfortable with their body, are challenged by acceptance of their identity, and experience a period of clumsiness as they attempt to overcome these changes. Due to situations of clumsiness, concern for appearance, and lack of comfort with their bodies, adolescents may find themselves dealing with fluctuating emotions.

**Emotional Development:**

The transition from child to adolescent to adult causes strong and rapid changes manifested in the adolescent's emotional development. This aspect of development is encompassed by many physical and biochemical changes which may cause a decrease in the individual's self-esteem (Lambert, Rothschild, Altland, & Laurence, 1978). There is a conflict between the adolescent's desire to become independent and his or her wish to hold onto a childlike dependency. According to Montemayor, Adams, and Gullotta (1990), there is a significant change in the adolescent's emotional development with regard to his or her friends. During this period of life, adolescents become closer and more intimate with friends who appear to be an increasingly important source of social support. Some adolescents depend so much on their friends that "being alone becomes worse than having to write a calculus test" (Bibby & Posterski, 1992, p. 200). During the transitions within the adolescent's emotional development, parents, teachers, and other individuals in contact with adolescents must be prepared to handle those who may be in emotional turmoil. They must also encourage the
adolescent to seek alternative resources for assistance in order to find his/her form of independence.

**The Effect of Parents and Peers on the Grade Nine Student**

Parents and peers contribute in different but significant ways to the grade nine student's development. Research by Coleman (1980) and Parson (cited in Fasick, 1984) show that the primary focus of adolescence is the development of independence. These researchers found that, during adolescence, an individual undergoes a transition from dependency on parent(s) to a dependency on peers. This transference of dependency occurs as parents and peers assume new roles for the adolescent. Bibby and Posterski (1992) agree that this change in dependency is critical, and parents should not expect to be the only source of influence in their adolescent's life.

Although adolescence is a period of increasing independence and assertiveness, family attitudes and practices -- both racial, ethnic, and otherwise -- still play important roles in the adolescent's development. In fact, "the quality of family relationships is crucial in determining the competence and confidence with which young people negotiate the major tasks of adolescence" (Noller & Callan, 1991, p. 1). Noller and Callan (1991) and Takanishi (1993) propose that adolescents seek their parents for guidance and direction in important decisions involving moral values and career choices. These researchers found that it is the parent(s) who appear(s) to influence the adolescent in his or her identity exploration. Parents emphasize the importance of adolescent autonomy and
independence as well as family "togetherness," closeness, and loyalty. Hauser et al (1991) suggest that the continuing bond between adolescents and their parents, although transformed, provides a foundation of support for growth through adolescence and into adulthood. However, family relationships can also obstruct adolescent development through restraints on self-assertion and disruptions in connectedness. It is during these negative periods that adolescents seek their parents for comfort and advice.

Peers may be important references for style and taste in fashion and entertainment, but not for enduring values. "With parents, adolescents are likely to talk about progress in school and career goals. With their friends, adolescents talk about dating problems, views on sexuality, personal experiences, common perspectives, and interests and doubts" (Savin-Williams & Berndt, 1990, p. 278). As well, Greenberg, Siegel, and Leitch (1983) state that adolescents are more likely to seek help from their peers when they perceive their parents as rejecting or indifferent. Nonetheless, the development of strong peer relationships does not necessarily mean that these relationships supplant those with parents. Fasick (1984) argues that "it is more appropriate to think of adolescent relationships becoming broader, less centered on the family" (p. 150). Young people should not be seen as rejecting their parents for their friends. Rather, as Smith (1987) and Raja, McGee, and Stanton (1992) suggest, they should be viewed as allowing peers to have an increasing influence upon certain aspects of their lives, paralleling the continuing influence of their parents.
The Effect of the Community Members and Administrators on the Grade Nine Student

School administrators and community members are other factors affecting the grade nine experience. According to Mootial (1992) and Heffernan (1993), many concerned parties fear that the dramatic shift from an elementary to a secondary school program could produce harmful effects on the academic, social, and emotional development of adolescents, especially those at the lower level of academic achievement.

Until recent announcements made by the Ontario Ministry of Education in June of 1997, the Ministry of Education (1990), in an effort to ease the transition from elementary to secondary school, had developed a set of initiatives to reformulate and restructure the grade nine education program. As part of the initiatives, the government had made the commitment to develop and implement a core curriculum for grades seven to nine, eliminate streaming in grade nine, and improve support for students in making the transition from elementary to secondary school. As such, the transition year grade nine program, according to Cole (1993), would have remained similar to the holistic experience of elementary school with grouped classes and active learning.

The grade nine curriculum presently includes a de-streamed cohort involved in core classes (i.e., Math, English, Science, and French) and exploratory classes (i.e., Visual Arts, Dramatic Arts, Music, and Family Studies). Thus, the traditional "streamed" system with segmented ability groups and subjects taught
by specialized teachers was to be phased out of the grade nine education program. This situation has changed. The Ministry of Education (1997) has decided to change its initiatives, beginning in 1999. The revised initiatives are set to re-establish a streamed grade nine education system which will focus "on high academic achievement and cooperative, work placement programs" (Hamilton Spectator, June 20 1997, p. A1).

Although the Ministry of Education seems to concentrate on programs which focus on equity, they may fail to realize that students entering grade nine are not all equally prepared for success (Heffernan, 1993). The rationale for the destreamed and exploratory courses, according to Hargreaves, Januario, and Macmillan (1990), was to "expose all students to all these subjects in order to provide a more informed basis for subject choices later" (pp. 87-88). Unfortunately, this type of grade nine program is showing some negative effects on the student.

A destreamed education system affects not only students but teachers as well. Destreaming may impact on some teachers more heavily than on others. Changes brought about by the new education system may cause some grade nine teachers to question their ability to instruct effectively. They are required to find new strategies to teach mixed ability classes and this may be a difficult task which, in turn, may affect the grade nine student.

Not only does the changing curriculum affect the grade nine student, but Cole (1993) has found that parents and community members have continually
demanded higher quality education for all children, whether at the basic, general, or advanced level. Curricular reform, budget cuts, and staffing changes are among the many challenges facing schools and their Boards. In turn, these educational issues may hinder the educational system's ability to provide high quality education especially to those students at the grade nine level.

Studying the perceived effect of teachers, parents, peers, administrators, and community members on the development of the grade nine student is a complex area of research. It is complex due to the fact that there are many variables which may impact the grade nine student's development. Transitions are critical periods of change for grade nine students because they are points of maximum discontinuity. How the student reacts to grade nine will largely determine his or her success in secondary school and beyond.

Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to examine grade nine teachers' perception of how teachers, parents, peers, administrators, and community members influence the development of the grade nine student. This study may help to suggest methods of enhancing the secondary school experience for students at the grade nine level.
Overview

This chapter describes the pilot research which led to the present study. The chapter also includes a description of the process of selecting participants, the instrumentation used, the data collection methods, and the recording procedures.

Description of Research Methodology:

The research project began with a concept map (Appendix A) from which the present study was developed. Next, a proposal was presented to the Brock University Human Ethics Committee in order to obtain approval (Appendix B) to conduct a study involving human participants. Once approval was granted, a regional Board of Education, which was easily accessible to the researcher, was contacted using a letter (Appendix C) entailing a description of the research project. Following approval from the Board, all of the secondary school principals in the Board were contacted, by letter, for permission to conduct the survey within the schools (Appendix D). Six of the secondary schools’ principals agreed to distribute the surveys in their schools.

Selection of Participants:

Participants were selected from the six schools in the following manner. One hundred and eighty surveys (Appendices Ei and Eii) were distributed. Fifty-three (29%) were completed and returned to the researcher. From these, eligible participants were selected according to the research prescribed criteria.
The criteria were that the participants had to be teaching at the grade nine level at the time of the study and have a minimum of five years teaching experience at this level. Of the twenty-eight who fulfilled the criteria, ten were randomly selected, four males and six females. Even though a random approach was used, the ten selected individuals were from only three of the six participating schools.

Pilot Study:

The pilot study was conducted primarily to test the face validity of the interview questions (Appendix F). It assessed whether the interview questions were understood by the participants, and whether the questions were adequate to obtain the desired information for the study.

For the pilot study, two grade nine teachers (one male and one female) served as participants. These individuals were selected based on their relationship with the thesis advisor. The pilot study resulted in three essential changes. First, the interview questions were clarified and refined (Appendix G). This was done in order to ensure that the information obtained was pertinent to the interview questions and study. For example, there is a perceived difference between the terms “teacher training” and “pre-service teacher training.”

Second, the requirements of the participants were clarified. The requirements were that the participants must have instructed at the grade nine level for a minimum of five years. From the pilot study it was revealed that experience does make a difference. One of the two pilot participants had more
experience instructing at the grade nine level and therefore had a comfort level in teaching and appeared to be more insightful regarding the grade nine student's characteristics and needs.

Third, the number of participants needed for the study was finalized. Based on the pilot study, the researcher was able to anticipate where participants would provide similar responses to questions. Therefore, a sample larger than ten participants did not appear vital for the study.

**Instrumentation:**

The interview guide consisted of a set of twenty interview questions which were classified into two sections, "background" and "topic" information. Questions regarding teacher training, teaching experience, and subject areas encompassed the "background" portion of the interview. The "topic" information included questions regarding each of the five factors (teachers, parents, peers, administrators, and community members). The conversation during the interview included a discussion on how each factor influenced the development of the grade nine student. Secondary clarifying questions, and tertiary conversation were used to expand upon the primary questions.

**Data Collection and Recording:**

After the sample was selected, the individuals were contacted by telephone at their schools to arrange interview times. The interviews were scheduled during the day, usually at lunch or during a teacher's preparation period. All
interview sessions lasted approximately one hour and were held within a two week time period in October, 1996.

Participants were interviewed individually in a private room at their school. Each subject signed a consent form prior to the interview (Appendix H) and granted permission for the interview to be tape-recorded. The interviews were later transcribed into a computer word processor for analysis.

Upon completion of the interviews, all participants and those who indicated interest in participating, received thank you letters (Appendices I and J).

Data Analysis:

Each interview session was transcribed in its entirety. Next, the transcriptions were analyzed and all responses were grouped according to the question to which the response referred. Responses were then organized according to the five external factors: role of the teacher, role of the parent, role of peers, role of administrators, and role of community members.

Often, the participants shared anecdotal experiences in their responses. The importance of the participants' anecdotal information was noted and incorporated into the study findings as appropriate. Furthermore, the tables and figures reveal the frequency of similar responses among the participants.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This chapter includes the results of the interview process. The results report participants’ perceptions of factors influencing grade nine students’ transition from child to adult and from elementary to secondary school. It should be noted that, although this study involved grade nine teachers’ perception of factors influencing grade nine students, their perception may not necessarily be reality. What may be occurring in this Board of Education may not hold true for other Boards. Therefore, it should be stressed that one should not make generalizations from the present study.

Background Information

A part of the interview addressed teacher training, teaching experience, subjects areas taught, and teacher activities reported on a weekly basis. Each aspect is presented in the following section.

Table 1 presents background information for each participant, including level and years of teacher pre-service training as well as number of years of teaching experience in general, and at the grade nine level. Overall, the participants had taught an average of 21.5 years at the secondary level, and 17.5 years at the grade nine level.

At the time of this study, all participants taught at the grade nine level and all also had experience at other grade levels. The subject areas taught by the participants included: French, English, Arts (includes Music and Drama),
### Table 1.

**Background Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Years of Teacher Preservice Training (1 yr = 8 mo)</th>
<th>Level of Teacher Preservice Training</th>
<th>Teaching Experience gr. 9 - OAC (years)</th>
<th>Teaching Experience gr. 9 (years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>I/S</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>I/S</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>I/S</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>J/I</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>I/S</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>I/S</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>I/S</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>I/S</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>I/S</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>5 months</td>
<td>I/S</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>7.5 months</td>
<td>I/S</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I/S = intermediate/senior  
J/I = junior intermediate
Mathematics, Science (includes Chemistry, and Physics), History, Physical Education, Business (includes Computers) and "other" (includes English as a Second Language, Society Challenge and Change, Photography, Animation, French Immersion, and Language Development). These are presented in Table 2.

To illustrate how teachers distributed their time on a weekly basis, Figure 1 shows that, per week, four teachers spent most of their time instructing students, four spent most of their time evaluating students, while one teacher spent more time providing extra assistance to students. It was apparent from the responses provided that, in general, grade nine students in the schools surveyed do not seek extra assistance from these teachers.

Those teachers who spent most of their time instructing were teachers in the subject areas of French, Physical Education, and English. These teachers stated that they were constantly teaching, either to the whole class or to groups of students. They spent most of their time overseeing all activities. The teachers who spent less time instructing classes per week were teachers who chose teaching methods of independent learning and group work as may be observed in a mathematics class.

Those who spent more time evaluating students were teachers of French (2) and English (2). These teachers try to provide feedback for every student's assignment. As well, the report cards for the grade nine level require outcome and anecdotal evaluations.
Table 2.

Subject Taught by Participant: Grade Nine Subjects vs. Grade 10 - OAC Subjects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Grade Nine Subjects (n)</th>
<th>Grade 10-OAC Subjects (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Education</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: (n) = the number of respondents
Figure 1. Number of hours per week in preparation, instruction, evaluation, and provision of extra assistance.
Finally, all of the participants appear to have spent the least amount of time preparing for classes per week. This situation may be due to experience. The more experience a teacher has, the less time he or she may require to prepare a lesson. Teachers may also recycle lessons and modify content according to the group's needs. It should be noted that only four of the participants (1, 3, 7, and 9) provided a time value for preparation, instruction, evaluation, and extra assistance, while the other six participants (2, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 10) did not provide a clear response.

In a question inquiring about who assists teachers who wish to adjust their teaching program and methods of course evaluation, the following individuals were suggested: Department Head (42.1 %), Vice Principal (26.3%), Principal (21.1%), Learning Resource Teacher (5.3%), and the Subject Coordinator (5.3%). It should be noted that the Department Head and the Subject Coordinator possess different positions. The Department Head holds a teaching position within the school and is an internal facilitator while the Subject Coordinator is a Board of Education consultant and external to the school.

**Topic Information**

In this section, issues such as teacher training and the perceived effect of the five factors -- teachers, parents, peers, administrators, and community members on the development of the grade nine student -- are addressed. Results revealed that four participants chose to teach at the grade nine level while six were assigned grade nine courses by the Head of the Department. The
participants who chose to teach at the grade nine level did so for various personal and professional reasons such as, "teaching at the grade nine level provides the opportunity to put into place the skills that the students need to develop..." The participants who were assigned grade nine courses believed that they "did not have any choice." Whether the teachers were given a choice or not, it did not appear that they were disappointed to teach grade nine courses. Table 3 summarizes the participants' comments regarding the responsibilities of a grade nine teacher. Some of the participants pointed out that both the teacher and the student have changed tremendously during the past fifteen years.

When discussing teacher training for grade nine, three teachers replied that aspects of their teacher training, such as shared resources (i.e. texts and personal experiences) and practical teaching situations, adequately prepared them to teach grade nine students, while five participants indicated that they did not receive specific training for grade nine. Participants offered examples of theory, methodology, and practical courses which may have enhanced their teacher training program, as shown in Figure 2. Suggested theory courses were: psychology of the adolescent, educational theory, group work strategies and evaluation. Suggested methodology courses consisted mainly of strategies for dealing with classes of widely varying abilities. Finally, participants revealed that more practical teaching and public speaking opportunities would be beneficial as part of their teacher training.
Table 3.

The Perceived Roles of the Grade Nine Teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>stranger</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>camp director</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parent</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chaperone</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>counsellor (academic, health, relationships)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: (n) = number of respondents
Figure 2. Teachers' reports of inservice which may assist instructing at the grade nine level
Table 4 summarizes the participants’ perception of grade nine students’ emotional, social, physical, and academic changes. Emotionally, the grade nine student has become more experimental with his or her dependence on peers, in relationships with the opposite gender, and in his or her decreasing reliance on parent(s). Socially, the adolescent seeks more opportunity to be “social” both inside and outside the school setting. Due to the fact that being accepted and interacting with others has become more important, the adolescent has taken issue with his or her physical appearance. To ensure acceptance, the adolescent may purchase the latest fashions, listen to the same music, participate in particular sports, and/or perform tattooing and body piercing. Finally, when considering academics, some grade nine students appear to lack ability and/or knowledge in many subject areas. This may be due to lack of interest by the student or lack of opportunity in past educational experiences.

All participants suggested that, according to parents and community members, the demands of the education system and the evaluation system have not changed, in contrast to the decrease in educational standards for grade nine in the last few years. Although the areas of educational standards and student evaluation are different, the participants believe that these changes have been caused mainly by factors such as the government, the Ministry of Education, and changing societal philosophies.

When considering the demands, ideas, and opinions of parents and community members, the participants indicated that some individuals are not
Table 4

Perceived Evolution of the Grade Nine Adolescent During the Grade Nine Academic Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotionally</th>
<th>Socially</th>
<th>Physically</th>
<th>Academically</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Insecure</td>
<td>- discover opposite gender</td>
<td>- growth spurts</td>
<td>- some lack ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- experiment</td>
<td>- want to try sports</td>
<td>- girls mature/develop more visibly</td>
<td>- strong ones develop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- break ties with parents to connect with peers</td>
<td>- less time for school</td>
<td>- reach puberty</td>
<td>- boys immature and girls mature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- need guidance</td>
<td>- become more social</td>
<td>- clumsy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- see/hear intimidation</td>
<td>-appearance important (body pierce, clothes)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- smoke and drink</td>
<td>- closer to being &quot;adult&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: (n) = number of respondents
concerned with educational issues, as these issues are less important than family problems. Most parents and community members insist that their children learn the "basics," and be placed in a "good" class with others who are "good students." As well, parents prefer that their children be evaluated with letter or percentage grades and that the teachers provide relevant feedback.

Due to the educational standards and/or the demands of parents and community members, some of the participants have changed their teaching style. These teachers did so because they believed that educational standards such as the implementation of destreaming have lowered the standard of academic achievement. Other participants stated that they changed the way they teach for their own personal improvement and technology advancements.

Table 5 presents the participants’ perception of the role of the administrator on the emotional, social, physical, and academic development of the grade nine student. According to this study, it would appear that administrators have a greater impact on the student’s academic and social development than on the grade nine student’s physical development. In terms of the role of peers on the grade nine student’s development, the study indicates (Table 6) that peers have a strong influence on the grade nine student’s social development. The emotional, social, physical, and academic characteristics and needs of the grade nine student, as perceived by the participants, are shown in Table 7.

Finally, Table 8 lists other factors which may influence the five factors under investigation and, according to the participants, may in turn affect the grade nine
Table 5

Perceived Role of the Administrator and How the Administrator Affects the Development of the Grade

Nine Student

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotionally Responsible for:</th>
<th>Socially Responsible for:</th>
<th>Physically Responsible for:</th>
<th>Academically Responsible for:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- discipline (3)</td>
<td>- setting the tone of the school (1)</td>
<td>- health concerns (1)</td>
<td>- setting curriculum and timetable (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- concern for self-esteem (4)</td>
<td>- integrating grade 9’s (1)</td>
<td>- discipline problems (3)</td>
<td>- organizing activities (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- supervising events (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>- providing academic challenges (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- providing mentors (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- ensuring that course descriptions have a social skills element (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: (n) = number of respondents
Table 6.

Perceived Role of the Peer on the Development of the Grade Nine Student

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotionally</th>
<th>Socially</th>
<th>Physically</th>
<th>Academically</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- both mature/immature</td>
<td>- greatest influence</td>
<td>- sexual experiences</td>
<td>- determine potential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- seek each other</td>
<td>- share values/interests</td>
<td>- avoid being different</td>
<td>- peer pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- sensitive to friends</td>
<td>- support system</td>
<td>- need to belong</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: (n) = number of respondents
Table 7.

Perceived Characteristics and Needs of the Grade Nine Student

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional Characteristics</th>
<th>Social Characteristics</th>
<th>Physical Characteristics</th>
<th>Academic Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- shy and timid (1)</td>
<td>- want boy/girl friend (1)</td>
<td>- appearance is very important (1)</td>
<td>- try to fill gaps in their knowledge (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- &quot;party and hangout&quot; (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- participate in activities to be accepted (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional Needs</th>
<th>Social Needs</th>
<th>Physical Needs</th>
<th>Academic Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- need consistency (3)</td>
<td>- patterning/group work (1)</td>
<td>- need to be reassured (1)</td>
<td>- need more of the basics such as reading, writing, and mathematics (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- need to feel secure (3)</td>
<td>- need to know they fit in (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- need to know they are loved (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- need exposure to subject matter (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: (n) = number of respondents
Table 8.
Perceived Agents Which May Affect Grade Nine Students

| Teachers                        | - continually respond to changing educational initiatives (1)  
|                                | - low morale (3)  
| Parents                        | - the changing nature of family and work ethics (1)  
| Community                       | - declining societal expectations -- demand less, give less (1)  
|                                | - economics (1)  
| Administrators                  | - class size (2)  
|                                | - Ministry of Education's continuously changing policies (2)  
|                                | - introduction of new report cards which require anecdotal comments and grades based on a numerical scale of 1 to 3 (2)  
|                                | - outcome based education (3)  
| Government                      | - the government itself (2)  
|                                | - the destreaming program (4)  
|                                | - financial cutbacks and the need to fundraise (1)  

Note: (n) = number of respondents
student. It should be noted that the teachers do not mention peers during this portion of the interview but they do address the issue of government influence.

**Interpretation of the Findings**

Eccles and Midgley (1990) define adolescence as a period of developmental turmoil which may be significantly influenced by the transition from elementary to secondary school. In order to pursue this issue further, the present study examined grade nine teachers' perception of how teachers, parents, peers, administrators, and community members influence the development of the grade nine student. Of interest to the researcher was the enhancement of the secondary school experience for students at the grade nine level.

**Transition from Elementary to Secondary School**

According to Cole (1993) and Harter et al. (1992), there are drastic differences in the environmental structure and classroom experience from the elementary to the secondary level of education. Yet, according to the present study, it would appear that the grade nine year of secondary school has become similar to elementary school. The classes have become destreamed into heterogeneous skill and ability levels, as discussed earlier by Cole (1993). Not only has an environmental change occurred, but some of the teachers instructing at the grade nine level have had to transform as well.

According to one participant, when students enter secondary school, they initially view everyone, including the teacher, as a stranger. Students entering grade nine may be as young as thirteen and they may lack the maturity to face
the challenges of a secondary institution. Another participant commented that, "although they [students] are happy coming into secondary school, they are not ready." Due to their immaturity, grade nine students are dependent on the teacher, whether the students agree or not. In turn, the "stranger" relationship between the student and teacher quickly transforms, as five participants suggest, into a parent-child relationship. The parental role of the teacher requires that he/she provide structure, support, self-esteem, and introduce the skills necessary to survive in the world of secondary education. Several participants revealed that "many times we sacrifice the curriculum in order to make students do activities that make them feel part of the school, group, and community." This role may be similar to that played by the elementary teacher who provides for his or her students a nurturing and supportive environment conducive to enhancing their self-esteem (Cole, 1993).

Another role that the grade nine teacher may fulfill, as suggested by the interview comments, was the role of camp director. It was explained that this role requires that students be entertained and moved quickly from one activity to another during a class period. Grade nine students require many small, teacher-directed activities because they may have a low level of maturity, are not all able to work independently, and their attention span is not always focused.

A third role discussed by five participants suggested that grade nine teachers may need to fulfill the role of chaperone. This role requires that the teacher "control the hormones of the students." During this phase of his or her
growth and development, the adolescent is discovering and experimenting through relations with the opposite gender. According to one participant, the grade nine student seems to crave attention and relationships with the opposite gender. Having a boyfriend/girlfriend is a symbol of acceptance and makes an impression on the peer group. According to the participants, the grade nine teacher has an "obligation to get them [grade nine students] on the right track" by having the school nurse visit the class and educate the students regarding birth control, sexually transmitted diseases, family planning, as well as sexual harassment.

Finally, the grade nine teacher may find him/herself fulfilling the role of counselor: guidance counselor, medical counselor, or family counselor. According to the present study, grade nine students may have many problems to deal with. The grade nine teacher, therefore, has a number of responsibilities such as 1) providing the new students with an introduction to the secondary school environment, 2) dealing with academic and disciplinary problems, 3) delivering content and skills of a subject, 4) ensuring students are accepted by their peers, and, 5) as suggested previously, providing knowledge regarding birth control, family counseling, and possibly handling circumstances of family problems such as abuse, divorced families, and/or blended families.

As stated earlier, Gibson and Chandler (1988) suggest that, in general, better prepared teachers may be in a stronger position to assist grade nine students during their transition from elementary to secondary school. Based on
the present findings, it is apparent that teachers trained to instruct at the secondary level of education may not receive adequate training to prepare them to instruct at the grade nine level. Some of the responses to this question were: "everything we did was all couched in generalities," "I received very little preparation for teaching grade nine," and "nothing specific." However, one participant stated that "almost my entire teacher training was really geared to teaching at that level."

Regardless of the quality of teacher preparation, experienced teachers have developed knowledge both in a subject area and about students' diverse needs. However, without a basic foundation and experience in parenting, chaperoning, counseling, and in being a camp director, teachers may not be able to assist their students through the transitions from elementary to secondary school and from child to adolescent.

**Transition from Child to Adolescence**

According to three of the participants, the grade nine student evolves during the first year of secondary school, and "the change is most noticeable after the summer between grades nine and ten." The next section will discuss the emotional, social, physical, and academic changes as perceived by the participants.

**Physical Development:**

Participants believe that physical appearance is important, and that the grade nine student's body becomes a form of expression. Activities such as
tattooing, body piercing, and make-up, are performed in order to blend in with other adolescents, as acceptance into a clique is a source of reassurance that the adolescent does belong (Danesi, 1994).

The most noticeable change for the majority of grade nine students is the growth spurt. As puberty is reached, girls develop into their woman-like figures and boys grow in height. This finding is supported by the research of Coleman (1988) and Malina (1990). As one participant observed, “they come in at two feet tall and they leave six feet tall.” The clumsiness which often accompanies a growth spurt tends to hinder adolescents’ social involvement with peers, as they may be more shy and timid during that time.

**Emotional and Social Development:**

According to the present study, grade nine is a year of turmoil and change for students. The participants' comments supported the notion put forth by Coleman (1980) and Parson (cited in Fasick, 1984). In general, it is during this year that the adolescent begins to break ties with parents to connect with peers. One participant describes the grade nine year as a confusing time for adolescents, as they struggle with questions like: what parental advice do you retain and what advice do you dismiss? Who do you listen to and who do you not listen to? Which peers do you listen to? and Who do you hang around with?

Grade nine students are in a new school with new people and new teachers. They seek each other for consistency, security and, in general, for emotional
support. These changing relationships and environments may cause adolescents to feel both confused and insecure. Several participants have commented that the "most important thing in their [students'] lives is to be accepted into a clique." This coincides with Santrock's (1990) research. In this way, the emotional and social areas of development are intricately connected. Grade nine students do not want to be seen as different from the norm. Thus they wear the same clothes, participate in the same sports, and listen to the same music as the other individuals in the clique. Not only are they experimenting with their social appearance, but they may also be experimenting with their social activities (Simmons et al., 1987).

The literature reviewed by Luke and Sinclair (1991) reveals that grade nine is a significant year of social evolution for the adolescent. Five participants agree with this view, stating that students want and need the opportunity to socialize. As a result of their increased social awareness, students try out for sports teams, clubs, and do more activities outside school. Searching for and belonging to a peer group consumes a great deal of their daily and weekly time, leaving less time for academics.

**Academic Development:**

There appears to be a division in the participants' perception of this area of development. Some of the participants observed positive changes and growth while others stated that many students remain the same and that they "do not have a very realistic grasp of their abilities when they enter grade nine."
However, teachers do see intellectual progress in the stronger students by the end of the grade nine year. The teachers agree that peers do influence grade nine students' academic development. The present study supports the notion that peers affect the student's attitude and approach to school (Bibby & Posterski, 1992; Santrock, 1990). In fact, according to Steinberg and Darling (1994), peers may be the most potent influence on the student's daily academic achievement. To an extent, whether a student succeeds or not academically depends on whether his/her peers value school. What adolescents value most is relationships; they must often choose between being successful in school or being accepted by their peers.

The participants' divided perception of academic development may be due to changes in educational standards for the grade nine level such as the implementation of destreaming methodologies. One participant stated that, "the level of material that I can do with the students is much lower than what I used to teach and, of course, this has repercussions for every grade."

Other teachers mentioned that they are required to teach more social elements. The focus now "is to make the students feel good because their self-esteem has become a number one priority." Therefore, teachers are expected to modify their programs to stress positive self-esteem. In turn, changing educational standards have caused teachers to modify their teaching and/or methods. For example, teachers have incorporated multiple choice, fill in the blanks, patterning activities, and small group activities into their daily lessons.
They view this type of learning as very elementary and have required assistance from administrators to help them modify programs.

The Role of Administrators on the Development of the Grade Nine Student

Administrators also influence the emotional, social, physical, and academic development of the grade nine student in that they have various responsibilities as shown in Table 5. According to the participants, administrators do not have much direct contact with the students unless there is a disciplinary circumstance. Therefore, they do not appear to have a direct effect on the grade nine student. Administrators have responsibilities to the students and the extent to which they fulfill their various responsibilities will influence the development of the grade nine student. This agent of influence on the grade nine student’s development is often hindered by other factors such as teachers, parents, community members, and the government. In fact, two participants discussed parental interest in the grade nine student’s academic success. It was apparent that in some lower class, divorced, and/or “abused families” there was a low level of interest in the student’s academic success. Although, this is not always the case.

In order to respond to the changing nature of the family, work ethics, and economics, the government has incorporated cutbacks and closed vocational schools which in turn have increased class size. The government also continuously changes its educational initiatives, and the teacher is expected to respond to these changes. This situation is time and energy consuming and may have a negative effect on teacher morale. In full circle, these factors may
have harmful influences on the emotional, social, physical, and academic development of the grade nine student.
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary:

This study examined grade nine teachers' perception of how teachers, parents, peers, administrators, and community members affect the development of the grade nine student. Of interest to the researcher was the enhancement of the secondary school experience for students at the grade nine level.

Ten grade nine teachers, four males and six females, participated in the study which consisted of the completion of a one hour, tape-recorded interview. The present study revealed three primary findings. The first finding indicates that the grade nine student has evolved. Second, at this point in the grade nine student's development, the peer group is the focus of the grade nine adolescent's life. According to the findings, teachers think that the grade nine adolescent has become more experimental and dependent upon his or her friends when compared to the grade nine students of the past. As well, the adolescent appears to be a more social being who desires acceptance and interaction with the peer group.

The third finding is that the role of the grade nine teacher has dramatically changed in the last seventeen years. This study suggests that teachers believe that the effect of the teacher on the physical, emotional, social, and academic development of the grade nine student is increasing. The participants revealed that the grade nine teacher has had to take on many new roles which encompass caring and nurturing characteristics to inspire positive self-esteem in
the young student. Within these multiple roles, the grade nine teacher is also a provider of educational and life skills.

The secondary findings indicate that parents and community members have an effect on the academic development of the grade nine student. The findings showed that these teachers thought that parents and community members influence the grade nine student's long-term educational and career goals.

Finally, the study revealed that teachers believe that administrators do not have a direct effect on the physical, emotional, social, and academic development of the grade nine student. In fact, unless there are disciplinary problems, the administrators are usually in the background of the adolescent's development. The administrators have an indirect effect through the structural and functional aspects of the school and through their implementation of government directed educational initiatives.

Conclusions:

As Warne (1995) stated, "the reality of teaching is that it is always evolving" (p. 58) to reflect the social, political, and economic realities of the time as well as to fulfill the needs of the student. The primary finding from this study, which agrees with King's (1986) research, reveals that teachers believe that the grade nine student evolves emotionally and socially throughout the academic year into a more social being who seeks the support of friends, tries desperately to avoid being different, suffers from peer pressure, and has less time for academics. This evolution is strongly influenced by the external factors of teachers, peers,
parents and community members, and administrators interacting in the life of the adolescent grade nine student. As the emotional and social characteristics and needs of the grade nine student have changed with marked societal changes, the corresponding roles of the external factors have also changed (Mootial, 1992).

Summarizing the findings from the interviews, it is apparent that this sample of teachers think that some characteristics and needs of the grade nine student have remained unchanged. For example, the grade nine student is typically emotionally insecure and in need of guidance during his or her initial experiences in secondary school. The grade nine student continues to demonstrate both fear and exhilaration during the initial secondary school experience. Another characteristic which remains unchanged is that the adolescent grade nine student transfers his/her dependence on parents to dependence on peers. This supports the research by Coleman (1980) and Parson (cited in Fasick, 1984), and Bibby and Posterski (1992) which showed that parents and peers assume new roles for the adolescent. As stated previously, Noller and Callan (1991) and Takanishi (1993) proposed that adolescents seek their parents for guidance and direction in important decisions involving moral values and career choices. Adolescents seek their peers for comfort and advice regarding relationships and social situations.

In turn, these factors may affect the adolescent's emotional needs for security, love, reassurance, and a sense of belonging. Finally, in comparison
with the last seventeen years, the teachers believe that the modern day adolescent may suffer more family problems such as abuse, divorce, single parent families, and/or the adolescent may be a parent him/herself. It is possible that these family problems existed in the past, but were not brought to the attention of the teachers as openly as they are today. As one participant suggested, "everything has changed yet, nothing has changed."

Likewise, the participants indicated that changes in the family structure have forced many grade nine students to seek additional support from the school and their teachers. Thus, teachers may find themselves addressing the typical school issues of academic struggles, career goals, and aspirations of higher education. As well, grade nine teachers may find themselves taking on a parenting role facing issues of family turmoil, abuse, or fulfilling a source of motherly/fatherly support and guidance. In addition, the teacher may be a chaperone or family counselor offering knowledge about birth control, sexually transmitted diseases, and/or family planning. Perhaps teachers are becoming more involved in the lives of their students because society has acknowledged that the grade nine adolescent does indeed experience tremendous developmental turmoil.

It is important to note that many participants supported the notion that as the role(s) fulfilled by the grade nine teacher evolve, there may also be a need to revisit teacher training programs. The question to be examined is, whether the current teacher training programs adequately prepare teachers for the realities
and challenges of teaching at the grade nine level. The present teacher training programs may not incorporate preparation for the various roles in which current grade nine teachers find themselves involved. One participant supports this suggestion with the comment that "grade nine certainly does look different today than when I [the participant] first began teaching." Therefore, there is a need to modify the way teachers are currently prepared.

Finally, all participants perceived that the standards of education at the grade nine level have changed in the last seventeen years. Several of the participants believe that "the advance level of the 90's is not as challenging as the general level of the 60's." They offered many reasons for this situation, such as government cutbacks, changing societal philosophies, and the Ontario Ministry of Education's changing initiatives. Thus, according to these individuals, the standards of education at the grade nine level need to be re-evaluated to ensure that students receive a high quality education which provides knowledge necessary to survive in the world inside and outside the school. A recent news release from the Ministry of Education (1997) announced that "Ontario is committed to the development of a more rigorous high school program that will provide students with the skills and knowledge to succeed whether they move on to college, university, or work" (p. 1). This initiative aims to prepare all students for success. This recent action from the Ministry of Education illustrates the point made earlier that education and teaching are always evolving (Warne, 1995).
Recommendations:

This study would be incomplete if it did not raise further questions and issues. Three general issues arise as possible future studies. First, based on the interviews, it is suggested that the pre-service program for the intermediate/senior level be re-evaluated to include more opportunity for practical teaching as experience appears to be a vital aspect of pre-service training and whether or not the grade nine teacher will be able to respond to the changing needs of their students. As suggested by the interview participants, further instruction regarding the psychology of the adolescent, and strategies for multi-level teaching are required.

Second, the standards for the grade nine level of education need re-evaluation. Students today live in a society of rapid and pervasive change (Lambert et al., 1978). Thus, it is necessary that the educational system maintain academic standards. These standards should evoke successful and knowledgeable students who are competent and can keep up with societal changes.

It is also suggested that more research be conducted in the area of grade nine education and the adolescent. Future research may include monitoring the recent changes initiated by the Ontario Ministry of Education in order to study the impact of the new policies on the development of the grade nine student. Research should also seek to survey the feedback from teachers in the field and how they perceive the secondary school programs. This information could then
be used to re-visit our pre-service training programs. Finally, more emphasis should be placed on the importance of pre-service teaching practicals to ensure that the lecture and theory curriculum is relevant to practical teaching situations. In other words, there needs to be more of a “team” situation between the Boards of Education, teachers in the field, pre-service training programs, as well as the Ministry of Education.

This research would help to further understand how teachers, parents, peers, administrators, and community members affect the development of the grade nine student. When there is better understanding about the adolescent’s development, individuals who are factors in the development will be better prepared to remove obstacles and contribute to the positive growth and achievement in the adolescent’s transitions from child to adult and from elementary to secondary school.
REFERENCES


The interplay of family, school, peers, and work in adjustment (pp. 24-45).


APPENDIX A: CONCEPT MAP

THE ADOLESCENT

Child to Adult

School Culture

School Structure

Elementary to Secondary School

Peers

Teachers

THE GRADE NINE STUDENT

Physical

Social

Academic

Emotional

Teacher Training

Administrators

Community

Parents

Popular Media
FROM: D. Butz, Chair
Standing Subcommittee on Research with Human Participants

TO: P. Cote-Laurence
Physical Education

FILE: 95-254

DATE: September 17, 1996

Thank you for the information requested previously, the Brock University Standing Subcommittee on Research with Human Participants has reviewed the research proposal:

TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF FACTORS AFFECTING GRADE NINE STUDENTS' DEVELOPMENT
DIANE HOFER

The Subcommittee finds this proposal to conform to the Brock University guidelines for ethical research.
APPENDIX C: LETTER OF PERMISSION FOR BOARD OF EDUCATION

Diane Hofer
--- -------------- ----
-----------, ON --- ---

Director -------------
"A" Board of Education
--------Street, ----
-----------, ON --- ---

July 8, 1996

To Director ---------------

I am a graduate student of Brock University and I am interested in conducting research for my thesis project with the assistance of "A" Board of Education. In the faculty of Education at Brock University, the project is supervised by Dr. Paulette Cote-Laurence (905-688-5550 ext. 4365).

I have chosen to conduct a study on the development of the grade nine student. Specifically, I am interested in the grade nine teacher's perception of the students' development during their initial year of secondary school.

In order to obtain this information, I would like to interview ten teachers who are currently instructing at the grade nine level. The ten teachers will be selected from responses to the initial survey (see attached). In the initial survey, teachers will be asked to complete a questionnaire about their teaching experiences. The initial survey will be distributed to all grade nine teachers. Those teachers who agree to participate and are selected as one of the interview candidates, will then be notified by telephone and an interview time will be arranged.

The present letter seeks your permission to conduct this initial survey in the "A" Board of Education. If you have further questions, concerns, or comments please contact me at the above address or telephone number.

Sincerely,

Diane Hofer
encl
APPENDIX D: LETTER OF PERMISSION FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Diane Hofer
--- -----------
------, ON --- ---

Principal
------ Secondary School
------ Street
------, ON --- ---

August 27, 1996

I am a graduate student at Brock University and I am interested in conducting research for my thesis project with the assistance of the "A" Board of Education. In the faculty of Education at Brock University, the project is supervised by Dr. Paulette Cote-Laurence (905-688-5550 ext. 4365).

I have chosen to conduct a study on the development of the grade nine student. Specifically, I am interested in the grade nine teacher's perception of the students' development during their initial year of secondary school.

In order to obtain this information, I would like to interview ten teachers who are currently instructing at the grade nine level. The ten teachers will be selected from responses to the initial survey (see attached). In the initial survey, teachers will be asked to complete a questionnaire about their teaching experiences. The initial survey will be distributed to all grade nine teachers. Those teachers who agree to participate and are selected as one of the interview candidates, will then be notified by telephone and an interview time will be arranged.

The present letter seeks your permission to conduct the initial survey in your school. I will be in contact with you by September 20, 1996.

Sincerely,

Diane Hofer
encl
APPENDIX E(i): LETTER FOR INITIAL SURVEY

Principal
------ Secondary School
------ Street, ON
------, ON --- ---

September 16, 1996

Dear ------,

Thank you for allowing me access to your teaching staff for my Master's thesis.

Please find enclosed the survey which is to be completed by all teachers currently instructing at the grade nine level. Once completed, the form should be returned to your office by Friday September 27, 1996. I will collect the completed surveys by Tuesday October 1, 1996.

If you have further questions or concerns, please contact Diane Hofer at (905) -- ----- or Dr. Paulette Cote-Laurence, thesis supervisor, at (905) 688-5550 ext. 4365.

I appreciate your time and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Diane Hofer
encl
APPENDIX E(ii): INITIAL SURVEY

I am a graduate student at Brock University, and I am interested in examining the grade nine teacher's perception of the students' development during their initial year of secondary school.

In order to obtain the information, I would like to interview ten teachers who are currently instructing at the grade nine level. These teachers will be selected from the following survey of teaching experience. Those teachers who agree to participate may be asked to participate in the follow up interview.

Thank you for your cooperation,

Diane Hofer
Supervisor: Dr. Paulette Cote-Laurence, Brock University, (905) 688-5550

Please complete the following survey in the space provided.

1. How many years of teaching experience do you have at the grade nine level? i.e., 1 year = 10 months teaching a grade nine course or 1 year = two 5 month grade nine courses in ten consecutive months

2. How many years was your teacher training program?

3. What is the level of your specialization?
   junior ___  intermediate/senior ___  junior/intermediate ___  other ___

4. What subject(s) do you teach at the grade nine level?

5. Are you willing to participate in a 1 hour interview arranged at your convenience? Yes ___ No ___

Name (print) ______________________ Signature ______________________
Date _______________________ Telephone ______________________
Male ________________________ Female ______________________
APPENDIX F: PILOT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

1. How many years was your teacher training program?

2. For what level did you receive your teacher training?
   - elementary
   - intermediate
   - secondary
   - other

3. How many years of teaching experience do you have?

4. How many years of teaching experience do you have at the grade nine level?

5. What subject(s) do you teach at the grade nine level?

6. What subject(s) do you teach in other grades?

7. How many hours per subject(s) do you teach per week?
   i.e., grade nine math = 6 hrs/wk

TOPIC INFORMATION:

8. Why did you choose to become/remain a grade nine teacher?

9. Since you began teaching at the grade nine level, has the grade nine student changed from year to year or is the grade nine student “typical?”

10. How does a grade nine student evolve/transform during his/her first year of secondary school? Give an example.
    - emotionally
    - socially
    - physically
    - academically

11. Since you began teaching grade nine, have the educational standards for that grade changed?
    If yes, why? If no, why?

12. Have the demands of parents changed regarding their demands of the education system and evaluation procedures for their children in grade nine?
13. Have the needs of grade nine students changed? Why?

14. Are there any other factors which affect those individuals participating in the grade nine level of education?
APPENDIX G: THESIS INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

1. How many years was your teacher pre-service program?

2. What was the level of your pre-service specialization?
   - junior
   - junior/intermediate
   - intermediate/senior
   - other

3. As of September 1996, how many years of teaching experience have you completed?
   1 year = 10 months teaching a grade nine course
   or
   1 year = two 5 month grade nine courses in ten consecutive months

4. How many years of teaching experience do you have at the grade nine level?

5. What subject(s) do you teach at the grade nine level?

6. What subject(s) do you teach at other grades?

7. In a typical week, how many hours do you spend for each of the grade nine subject(s)
in the following activities?
   - preparation
   - teaching/presentation
   - evaluating student work
   - providing extra assistance to students outside of class time

8. In your school, who is responsible for evaluating and assisting teachers who wish to adjust their teaching program and methods of course/student evaluation?

TOPIC INFORMATION:

9. Why did you choose to become/remain a grade nine teacher?

10. How does the role of a grade nine teacher differ from the role of a grade twelve teacher?
11. During your teacher preparation, what training did you receive to prepare you to teach at the grade nine level?

12. Which theory, methodology, and/or practical course(s) do you wish you had taken during teacher training to prepare you to teach at the grade nine level?

13. How does a grade nine student evolve/transform during his/her first year of secondary school? Give an example.

- emotionally
- socially
- physically
- academically

14. Since you began teaching in grade nine, have the educational standards for that grade changed?

If yes, why? How? If no, why?

15. How have the demands of parents/community members changed regarding their ideas and opinions of the education system and the evaluation procedures of their children in grade nine?

16. Due to the educational standards and/or the demands of parents/community members, have you had to change your teaching style/method? How?

17. How does the role of administrators affect the development of the grade nine student?

- emotionally - socially
- physically - academically

18. How does the role of peers affect the development of the grade nine student?

- emotionally - socially
- physically - academically

19. How have the needs of grade nine students changed? Why?

- emotionally - socially
- physically - academically

20. What other factors affect teachers and students participating in the grade nine level of our education system?
APPENDIX H: INFORMED CONSENT

I, (name) ____________________________, agree to serve as a participant for the study of the grade nine teacher's perception of the students' development during their initial year of secondary school. This study will be conducted by Diane Hofer (905 --- ----) as part of her graduate thesis. In the Faculty of Education at Brock University, the project is supervised by Dr. Paulette Cote-Laurence (905 688-5550 ext 4365).

It is understood that as a participant, I will participate in an one hour tape-recorded interview. I will be assigned a nominal identification number to ensure the confidentiality of my responses.

I understand that the study has been approved by the Brock University Human Subjects Committee and will not cause me any harm or distress.

I reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time and I also realize that a copy of the results will be made available to me in October of 1997. A copy of the results will be left in the office of my school.

I agree to the above and I am fully aware of my rights as a participant.

Participant's name (print) ________________________________________________
Participant's signature _________________________________________________
Participant's telephone number __________________________________________
Date ___________________________________________________________________
Witness' signature _____________________________________________________
Date ___________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX I: THANK YOU LETTER #1

Diane Hofer

-------- Secondary School
-------- Street
--------, ON --- ---
(905) --- ----

Dear

Thank you for completing the initial survey which was distributed to all grade nine teachers in your school.

Due to the incredibly positive response from the grade nine teachers in the "A" Board of Education, I have had to select a small number of teachers for the interview.

I thank you and appreciate the time you took to assist with my research in its first phase.

Sincerely,

Diane Hofer
Dear

Thank you for assisting with my research for my Master's thesis. I appreciate the time you took from your schedule to complete the initial survey and interview. The information that you provided was valuable to my project and very interesting to hear.

By October of 1997, I hope to have completed this project and I will be leaving a copy of the final thesis in the office of your school for a brief duration.

If you wish further information please contact Diane Hofer at (905) --- ---- or Dr. Paulette Cote-Laurence, thesis advisor, at (905) 688-5550 ext 4365.

Sincerely,

Diane Hofer