# Education in the Halls: Students' Perspectives on Cultural Expression and Resistance.

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Abstract

This research is a qualitative study of cultural reproduction and resistance from students' perspectives. Thirteen teenagers (eight in attendance in regular high schools and five drop-outs) were recruited to take part and were involved to varying degrees through interviews, journal writing, and group interactive sessions. A purposive sampling design was used initially to recruit individuals known to the researcher through contacts in an alternate education setting. Other participants were recruited throughout the research phase.

The theoretical aspects are premised on the work of Paul Willis, Michel Foucault, and Pierre Bourdieu. The reflexive praxeology of Bourdieu reflects the position taken as one way of understanding how students construct and respond to the situations of cultural dominance they experience in schools. The same reflexivity is offered for suggestions as to how teachers can respond to their own position in the education system.

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# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

## Personal Issues and Background

Prior to my appointment to a position as a learning resource teacher in a high school, I worked in an intermediate alternate education program. Typically, students were referred to the program due to persistent truancy, lack of self-esteem, or for behaviours which were deemed inappropriate for a classroom setting. They were most often labelled as at-risk of dropping out of school. It was just as likely, however, that they would be forced out by the system due to their various behaviours. Referrals usually identified these students as defiant, uncooperative, unmotivated, reluctant learners or school-phobic.

Comments such as these can be seen to indicate the kind of resistance and concerns about student performance identified by other researchers (Willis, 1977; Lytle, 1992). At the same time, such comments about students' performances in schools can be seen to betray a social agenda which either does not permit or even rejects any question about the inadequacy of the school system to accommodate itself to the diverse social and cultural needs which students bring to

schools. My own involvement in this alternate education setting continually reinforced the need to be cognizant of the social/cultural apsects of schools and the lived experiences of students. That involvement and my personal experiences in education suggested to me that we cannot address reform and change without considering this social/cultural dynamic in personal lives and institutional settings.

A very few students I have had the occasion to work with have been able to articulate their difficulties in school in terms of cultural issues. The vast majority simply talk about their problems as conflict between themselves and school officials, both teachers and administrators, boredom, or the irrelevance of their various courses of study. A very few people, students or teachers, identify the behaviours that accompany these attitudes as indicative of a critical response to a dominant and marginalizing cultural agenda that is part of the educational curriculum and institutions. What often surprises me is that the vast majority of the students consistently express a strong desire to complete high school or espouse a belief in the need for and importance of an

education despite their criticisms.

While my experiences with these resistant students provide the immediate motivation for pursuing this study of culture, the present focus represents a very long personal struggle that dates from my early days studying theology. At that time the point of entry into these arguments involved an examination of the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity, autonomy and heteronomy in ecclesiology. In very practical terms, it represented a need to find a balance between orthodoxy and personal experience. The issue has resurfaced throughout my studies in education over the past few years. It impacts most immediately on my own practice and the personal/social perspectives that I bring to the educational site. This research process is yet another way for me to revisit familiar terrain.

Of equal concern to me, however, is the debate about the future of education. Recent reports (Valpy, 1994) suggest that most high school graduates are unlikely to find employment and will be competing in an increasingly shrinking job market. Schecter (1987) and Livingstone (1987) suggest that the present crisis in

capitalism means that the transformations taking place will entail significant changes in the nature of work and the type of jobs available. Schecter's predictions hold out the prospect of less work in a technologically advanced form of capitalism as well as further stratification of the population. This suggests that a debate about the future of education within the emerging economic and cultural scenario needs to involve more than discussions about skill training, competencies, models, and so forth. This research is an attempt to garner students' perspectives on educational issues by focusing on issues of culture and resistance.

## Theoretical Positions

My most recent reflections and ruminations have been informed by theorists such as Foucault (1979) and Bourdieu (1990). Their work provides insights into how curriculum, which is both academic and social, is created and implemented and the degree to which it encourages domination and marginalization. While I have found Foucault to be challenging and insightful, I have questions about the adequacy of his theory in dealing with responses to systemic structures,

specifically in terms of agency and change. Bourdieu has proven to be more helpful in understanding and addressing issues about the social context of education and the dynamic between systems and individuals. The concern here, however, lies in the determinism which seems to pervade his theoretical approach.

I recognize the extent to which many alternate education programs or the motives for referrals are predicated on a behaviouralist approach. My own position has changed significantly over the past few years and my research, course work, and personal readings have made me more critical of this behaviouralism. I have become increasingly interested in social production theory which has led me to believe that cultural analyses might prove more beneficial in addressing the educational agenda and the structuring of schools. A cultural analysis suggests the possibility of a discussion of a number of issues. The first of these might be the recognition of the plurality of cultural perspectives which all participants in the educational setting bring to it. This entails an implicit understanding that schools are not static or neutral social sites but represent

situations in which diverse personal and cultural experiences are brought together (Gaskell, 1992). This interplay of diversity and plurality in school settings raises the issue of resistance to dominant or competing cultural expressions. My own reading of research literature (Giroux, 1983; Tanner, 1990; & Weis, 1990) suggests some difficulty in defining what resistance is and what exactly its importance is in affecting or determining student performance.

A study of the importance and role of culture may reveal that students simply go through the forms of education and use school sites for social networking and the exchange of their own information in much the same way they use shopping malls, coffee shops, and pool halls. As Beck (1990) says in paraphrasing Lenny Bruce, "In the halls of education, the only education is in the halls" (p. 343). It becomes critical, therefore, to investigate how the experiences and perceptions of at-risk students and alternate models of education can "saturate and transform the mainstream thereby challenging and invigorating it, rather than supporting the mainstream from the problematic margins" (Fine, 1990, p. 61). The final result of this research

might be an opportunity to add students' voices to the debate about schools and education in the new economic order that lies before us.

Purposes

The purpose of this research was to determine the extent to which student perceptions of cultural diversity and expression affect their own experiences in school. Such a discussion can allow for an opportunity to raise the issues of cultural expression with students thereby enabling them to evaluate the extent to which cultural hegemony and marginalization have affected their own experiences.

A second purpose was to use student experiences to create a clearer understanding of the nature of resistance and provide a more precise definition of it. This means that students could become more aware of their own responses and reactions to schooling as forms of resistance.

Finally, this research was intended to bring students' voices to the debate about the future of schools and education in general. I would hope that the discussions with students would provide some suggestions as to ways in which the diverse cultural

expressions which they bring to the school site can enliven and reshape current practices and pedagogy.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The following chapter is an consideration of various sources, both theoretical and practical research, which were examined in preparation for the study of students' perceptions about cultural reproduction. This review of literature does not purport to be global in analyzing all extent material on the topic under consideration. It reflects what might be considered seminal works, my own personal choices, and a host of other authors and researchers suggested through my reading or by advisors.

### Reproduction and Resistance

Willis (1977) is perhaps one of the most important sources for examining and critiquing the reproductive aspects of schooling and student resistance. His study of working class "lads" was useful and novel in that it recognized the systemic reproduction of dominant culture, student resistance to it and the extent to which this resistance fosters its own form of marginalization. The impact of Willis' work was to suggest that we need to examine culture and reproduction as something other than the imposition of ideology and to scrutinize more closely the relationship between structure and agency. Willis

pointed out that, "individuals are not passive receivers of structural forces; rather they interpret and respond to those forces in creative ways" (as quoted in MacLeod, 1987, p. 152).

Even though social theorists like Giroux (1983) tended to support the basic analysis Willis offered, there is the suggestion that these theories of reproduction and resistance need clarification or qualification. Giroux pointed out that not all oppositional behaviours represent a reaction against authority and dominance but can be understood as an "appropriation and display of power" (1983, p. 103). There is also the suggestion that rather than critiquing student resistance negatively, we need to treat it positively by providing productive ways for it to find expression within schools. These points indicate aspects of what can be identified as a reflection of a Foucauldian perspective. Giroux stated quite clearly that his own view of power and the ways in which it works were based on the work of Foucault (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985).

Foucault

In his study of prisons and systems of punishment

Foucault (1979) charted the correlational aspects of the development of power and knowledge and the various technologies or disciplines which manage and control the populations of industrialized capitalist societies. Foucault was able to demonstrate how education is structured to use technologies such as hierarchies, normalization and objectification to constitute schools as sites of dominant cultural expression. This does not mean that the generation of alternatives is eliminated, only that they are subjugated or controlled.

Foucault's treatment of power was neither unidimensional nor pyramidal and was best described in terms of a web or capillaries throughout the matrix of society. This implied a multidimensional aspect by which individuals accepted or imposed on each other the technologies which were used in this power/knowledge construct. This understanding allowed for a consideration of the issues of freedom, resistance and the constitution of the self described in terms of agonism in his later work on sexuality (Foucault, 1985).

A Foucauldian analysis provides substantial

material worth considering in this present discussion. The power/knowledge construct indicates the historical constitution of discourse, in this instance, that of education, and its instrumentality in production and reproduction. Foucault contributed to the post-structuralist critique which disturbs the epistemic foundations which undergird educational discourse by calling into question the universalist, emancipatory or progressive metanarratives which have dominated educational discourse.

From one perspective, a Foucauldian analysis means that one of the intents of education is control, management, and subjugation whereby we become "our own and each other's jailer" (Roth, 1992, p. 692). Such an analysis also helps us to see how the discipline and content of curriculum serves in this control function within schools by valuing and prioritizing certain knowledge over others. "Power distributes opportunities and non-opportunities" (Cherryholmes, 1987, p. 310). Foucault (1980) posited that the current criticism of institutions, practices and discourses can be seen as an indication of the "insurrection of subjugated knowledge" (p. 81) or a

dissatisfaction with and a reappraisal of those regimes of thought which have been afforded a position of dominance in society. This helps to explain how subcultures emerge and the role they play in the critique of discourse and practice. It also encourages the creation of the theorization of resistance which was so central to Foucault's ethical considerations. Unfortunately, this was poorly developed and ill-defined perhaps because it comprised work which Foucault began late in his career or, in the tradition of post-structuralism, something he refused to do in order to avoid the temptations of grand theory and totalization.

This points out that one of the deficiencies of the Foucauldian analysis may be its inability to make suggestions as to how to affect substantive systemic changes. Foucault's analytic can leave one with tools which offer ways to critique but which reject notions of progress and provide no possibility for a teleological or eschatological goal. One can be left languishing in autonomy and personal resistance. However, as Ryan (1991) pointed out, one of the strengths of Foucault's analysis is that it

demonstrated only too clearly that no matter how well-meaning the changes to the system might be, they would have minimal effect as long as they continued to rely on traditionally accepted organizational formats that are based on the technologies of power/knowledge which dominate industrialized societies.

Bourdieu

I have found that Bourdieu's theoretical work offerd some relief from the difficulties encountered in Foucault. Bourdieu and Foucault appeared to provide an interesting counterpart to one another since their interests were much alike, and despite glaring differences, parallelled one another in the ways in which they discussed issues such as power and the construction of knowledge and discourses. Bourdieu made occasional reference to Foucault usually by way of pointing out their dissimilarities and by distancing himself from postmodernism, which he considered to be a "thinly veiled form of irrationalism" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 155).

Bourdieu's theoretical perspective seemed to hinge on two dominant notions, habitus and field. These two constructs affected the understanding of such issues as

cultural domination, agency, and resistance. Habitus, "the generative principle of responses more or less well adapted to the demands of a certain field, is the product of an individual history, but also, through the formative experiences of earliest infancy, of the whole collective history of the family and class" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 91). Field was the locus of the relations of force, meaning-making and transformation and provided the social space in which individuals and institutions struggled as dominant and dominated. The field conditioned or structured the habitus; habitus gave the field meaning and value (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 127). This construct allows us to analyze how fields operate and function in the generation and maintenance of power relations and the placement of individuals as agents. It also suggests that a field is always the location of conflict in which agents "have a propensity to orient themselves actively either toward the preservation of the distribution of capital or toward the subversion of this distribution" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 109).

Aronowitz and Giroux (1985) indicated that Bourdieu's social theory showed how the field of

education fostered a hegemonic curriculum which reflected the politicization of knowledge. At the same time, habitus was useful in demonstrating the impact of socialization organized around a dominant cultural consciousness and the ways in which the dominated participated in their own subjugation, much like Willis (1977). Aronowitz and Giroux (1985) also suggested, however, that Bourdieu's theory contained a number of serious flaws.

First, regarding agency effectiveness in transforming fields such as education, they noted, as others have done (Gorder, 1980 & Lakomski, 1984), that habitus was too deterministic and produced a radical defeatism. Secondly, they argued that Bourdieu failed to consider the nature and role of conflict and thereby eliminated a productive role for struggle, diversity and resistance. Thirdly, they contend that Bourdieu offers a very weak treatment of ideology by failing to acknowledge that schools are not only sites in which dominant ideologies are transmitted but also produced and in which the production of counter-ideologies is prevented. Lastly, and perhaps most important, was the criticism that Bourdieu did not give serious

consideration to the impact of the materiality of economic conditions which provided advantages for some students. This could be seen in the need for working class students to find employment during their school years in order support themselves or their families. The issue of materiality could also be seen in those students who did not possess the financial resources to continue their education.

Bourdieu challenged the strong reaction against his social theory by suggesting that it collides with the illusion of personal control ingrained in us by our industrialist/capitalist culture. "The notion of habitus provokes exasperation, even desperation, I believe, because it threatens the very idea that creators (especially aspiring ones) have of themselves, of their identity, of their 'singularity'" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 133). While habitus is understood as the historical construct of durable and transposable systems of perception, it need not be interpreted fatalistically. Habitus is "durable but not eternal" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 133) and is or can be open to perceptions which invite challenge and change especially in terms of the degree to which the dominant

cultural discourse is accepted (or rejected). Rather than speaking of it as deterministic or mechanistic, habitus is best understood in analogous terms as "fit" or "feel for the game," the game being the particular field to which or in which the structuring or conditioning occurs.

Moore (1978/79) may have been arguing along the same lines as Bourdieu when he said that organization along class or cultural principles does not necessarily mean that determinate effects would be generated. This may be an argument for recognizing the effect of agency or the relationship between habitus and field, to use Bourdieu's terminology. At the same time, we know that sorting, stratification and streaming affect the kind of attention students receive in schools and have significant consequences in terms of further education and career options (Curtis, Livingstone, & Smaller, 1992; & Kingston, 1993). Without giving any recognition to Bourdieu's social theory, Moore wrote, "The point at which working class children opt out of education represents not the limit of their ability to succeed, but the point commensurate with their group membership" (Moore, 1978/79, p. 52).

Harker (1984) believed that habitus gives much more potential for agency than might be recognized because it is a primarily mediating, rather than a strictly determinate, construct. Even though MacDonald (1980) criticized the notion of habitus for its social determinism, she suggested that it has advantages for feminist analysis because it combines psychoanalytical and sociological factors, subjective and objective forms of experience and "avoids biological determinism and purely ideological analysis" (p. 149). (This last point contradicts one of the criticisms levelled at Bourdieu's theory by Aronowitz and Giroux.) Habitus needs to be understood as the internalization and externalization of the dialectical relation between subjectivity and objectivity which insists "on the materiality of the 'bearer' as a biological organism existing chronologically" (Nice, 1978, p. 28).

The relationality of habitus and field possesses the inherent potential for struggle and resistance and includes the possibility of the generation of alternate or counter-cultural discourses and practices. We may safely assume that Bourdieu might credit the effect of recent resistance made by feminist discourse and that

of other minority groups as producing a "crisis of orthodoxy" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 38) which may lead to significant change. In addition, Bourdieu suggested that the present economic conditions marked by an overproduction of graduates and a devaluing of degrees exhibits factors which indicate potential renewal and which will increase the anxiety concerning the effectiveness of education to continue to offer everything it promises (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 44-45). All things considered, there appears to be no doubt that resistance is problematical within Bourdieu's social theory especially when he made comments such as: "Resistance may be alienating and submission may be liberating. Such is the paradox of the dominated, and there is no way out of it" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 155). My own preference is to consider this a comment on the paradox of resistance and not resistance itself.

Unlike Foucault, Bourdieu offered a "reasoned utopianism" (1992, p. 197) thus rejecting both horizonlessness and fanciful eschatological projections. He called for a praxeology that is based on reflexivity (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). While this is presented as an interest in creating a scientific

method for sociology, it has implications for intrapersonal and social application and specifically for education in addressing cultural production and reproduction.

This reflexivity encourages establishing sites of freedom within the fluidity of social fields and encouraging productive courses of action. This necessitates a clinical thinking which analyzes the factors that structure the habitus, how we respond and how we might respond differently. It produces a scientific rigor that questions the epistemology that we create. Reflexivity recognizes that the objectivist techniques and classifications created by a field such as education are political and, therefore, forms of domination. Reflexivity asks us to question how and why we categorize and to move beyond the historicity and artificiality of constructed boundaries to envisage alternate possibilities for how we structure ourselves and society. This elaboration counters the claim by Giroux (1983) that Bourdieu "disregards the assumption that reflexive thought may result in social practices that qualitatively restructure one's disposition or structure of needs, one's habitus" (p. 90). The

primary concern with Bourdieu's social theory may be more of a discomfort with the absence of concrete and specific methodologies which educators can use and the implicit rather than explicit analysis of resistance. It obviously needs to be left to others who are interested in or concerned about these specific issues to analyze them in more detail. Such is the case with resistance.

Giroux and Resistance Theory

As Giroux pointed out, resistance theory contributes to the analysis of culture by affirming that schools are "social sites characterized by overt and hidden curricula, tracking, dominant and subordinate cultures, and competing class ideologies" (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985, p. 71). Resistance theory also reminds us that schools are relatively autonomous and heterogeneous institutions which possess a diversity of interests which often contradict the dominant culture. McLaren said that "resistance occurs as part of the very process of hegemony" (1989, p. 197), an assertion similar to Bourdieu's point that struggle and opposition are inherent to the notion of field.

Resistance theory, apart from showing that dominant cultures are always faced with oppositional elements, has also shown how resistance confirms class domination and subordination rather than challenging it (Willis, 1977). The effect of this is to produce caution, least we end up romanticizing the notion of resistance within schools. We need to recognize that student resistance does not necessarily show itself as an "oppositional praxis" (McLaren, 1989, p. 196). At the same time, however, we cannot underestimate the less-heroic idiosyncratic, passive, indifferent or generally oppositional behaviours students can exhibit when confronted by the routines and expectations of the school system (McLaren, 1989). Giroux (1983) argued for a notion of resistance which contains an emancipatory dimension and which becomes a category within the analyses of theories of schooling. His specific agenda was to bring resistance theory into a process of radical pedagogy which will redefine the nature and purpose of education. This border pedagogy (Giroux, 1990; Giroux, 1992) was his attempt to bring educational practice and resistance together in a process of renewal and transformation. This

pedagogical work reflects an attempt to move beyond the cynicism surrounding the Leftist critique and to create a new langauge of possibility.

Senese (1991) suggested that Giroux's proposition was based on a misreading of theorists such as Gramsci and Marcuse and a failure to consider Surrealism as the most important challenge to institutional cultural hegemony. Senese suggested that producing or affecting change is difficult if not impossible from within bourgeois institutions. This suggests that the creation of a radical pedagogy that serves as a rallying point for an assault on cultural dominance is idealistic and is premised on a rationality which Giroux questions and challenges in the first place.

Like McLaren (1989), Giroux insisted that not all oppositional behaviours have a "radical significance" (1983, p. 103) and are not, therefore, responses to experiences of domination. In fact, oppositional behaviours can express aspects of domination and conformism especially in so far as they reflect, for example, the sexist and racial codes of the dominant structures. The point seems to be that "the concept of resistance must not be allowed to become a category

indiscriminately hung over every expression of 'oppositional behaviour'" (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985, p. 106). It would seem that Giroux wanted to define true resistance as having specific and deliberate political significance which generates critical thinking, reflective and collective action and struggle.

This may be the closest Giroux ever came to providing a working definition of resistance. It remains a theoretical construct that almost requires an act-by-act analysis when examining oppositional behaviours. The difficulty is that while some acts of resistance show this radical significance, others are "nothing more than an affinity for the logic of domination or destruction" (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985, p. 106) and still others reflect ambiguity. Giroux cited the example of teachers who leave schools early or fail to complete daily lessons plans. There are those who might suggest that this is act of resistance. On the other hand, it could just as easily be argued that it is nothing more than a sign of laziness.

Analyzing these behaviours requires a personal reflexivity or some kind of referent based on the history, the values, or the social and cultural

practices of the individual. MacLeod (1987) agreed with Giroux on this point but suggested that Giroux was open to criticism for failing to offer any investigation as to how such an analysis could happen. Despite Giroux's critique of Bourdieu's notion of habitus, it seems to suggest a viable option for analyzing the relationship between structure and agency.

Giroux (1983) wanted to argue that a theory of resistance is a necessary component in a radical pedagogy that incorporates cultural politics as the premise for innovations in education. The agenda here reflects a commitment to postmodernism and a concern about an increasing neo-conservative resurgence affecting discourse across fields (Giroux, 1990). Hanke (1992) and Olson (1992) supported Giroux in this endeavour and suggested that his pedagogy encouraged a counter-hegemony in educational discourses and practices.

Giroux's cultural politics focussed on the style, rituals, language, values and meanings generated within popular culture in order to "analyze what counterhegemonic elements such cultural fields contain,

and how they tend to become incorporated into the dominant culture and subsequently stripped of their political possibilities" (1985, p.99). This is indicative of Giroux's belief in the possibility of subordinate cultures to transform the structures of society and a commitment to the democraticizing of education by lending credence to students' voices. "By ignoring the cultural and social forms that are both authorized by youth and simultaneously serve to empower and disempower them, educators run the risk of complicity in silencing and negating their students" Giroux, 1992, p. 181-82). It may be pure idealism to think that any kind of radical pedagogy can rescue the oppositional aspects of subcultures from the process of incorporation. At the same time, as Senese (1991) warned, any notion of a radical pedagogy cannot ignore the cultural critique of the Left which asserts the difficulty in challenging the consciousness of society within its present institutions.

Cultural Expression

It is quite apparent how much Giroux's reflection on subcultures and their relationship with dominant cultural expressions is indicative of the work of

Hebdige (1979). He suggested that it is the style of subcultures which possess the most transformative potential. In addition, Hebdige argued that the linkages between social order, ideology, production and reproduction of the dominant culture are more fragile than might be expected and are susceptible to the resistance offered by subordinate groups within society. Hebdige suggested, however, that subcultures go through a process of resistance and diffusion in which each in turn becomes "fit for public consumption" (1979, p. 130) and therefore incorporated into the dominant culture. This approach bears a striking resemblance to Hegelian dialectics by positing that subcultures are antithetical expressions of the dominant culture which are constantly being synthesized or absorbed.

A more thorough reading of Willis (1977) suggests that he wanted to do more than discuss cultural production, resistance and the ways in which subordinate groups perpetuate their own marginalization. By devoting space to cultural penetrations and limitations Willis laid out aspects of his own cultural politics and his hope in the

possibility of counter-cultures transforming society. "The cultural is the creative, varied, potentially transformative working out - not the suffering - of some of the fundamental social/cultural relationships of society. As the counter-school culture lives against, exposes and reacts to the principle of general abstract labour it is worrying at the very heart of how the capitalist system runs and maintains itself. There is potential here for a, not merely partial and cultural, but for a total social transformation" (Willis, 1977, p. 137).

This aspect of Willis' work indicated the extent to which he is aligned with "possibilitarians" (Senese, 1991, p. 17) like Giroux and those like Hebdige who credit counter-cultures with the potential for renewal and change. Willis claimed that the reasons why this change has not taken place is due, on the one hand, to the lack of political organization. On the other hand, "Cultural penetrations are repressed, disorganized and prevented from reaching their full potential or a political articulation by deep, basic and disorientating divisions" (Willis, 1977, p. 145).

In some respects these points set the stage for

the cultural politics Willis (1990) presented through his consideration of common culture. Willis argued that the market economy produces the possibilities and opportunities for people to construct their own meaning and values. While acknowledging the importance of a notion of hegemony, he suggested that the changes in production taking place within the economy were indicators of a "failed or slipping hegemony - not new forms of it" (Willis, 1990, p. 157).

Willis suggested that common culture would put increasing pressure on and create further marginalization on education systems that are based on liberal humanist and elitist principles. Education would be tolerated for its ability to provide access to the wages which provide the commodities of leisure, consumption and cultural energies. "Education/training should re-enter the broader plains of culture and the possibilities there for the full development of human capacities and abilities, this time led not by elite culture but by common culture" (Willis, 1990, p. 148). Willis' analysis would seem to imply that consumerism expressed through common culture is the form that cultural politics has taken in advanced capitalism, a

political form which will produce the anticipated structural changes.

Feminist Critique

A feminist critique suggests a much different interpretation of the role and function of subordinate cultures and addresses issues which challenge the assumptions and conclusions of theoreticians like Hebdige and Giroux who formulate cultural politics around subcultural dynamics. Frith and McRobbie (1978/79), in their study of rock culture, pointed out that it reinforces traditional stereotypical definitions of masculinity and femininity. While originally perceived as an expression of rebellion, specifically around sexuality, rock culture has ideological proportions within capitalism and can be seen as a reproductive tool. The difficulty in separating rock from this ideological construct is that capitalism has made sex a leisure activity which has become an integral part of a consumer society.

McRobbie (1980) suggested that subcultural theorists develop their positions through a specific male bias in defining youth and fail to consider issues that are of importance to females, especially family

and domestic life. She posited that subcultures are inherently male preserves in which women are treated as objects producing marginalization and abuse. She argued that while Willis (1977) was able to demonstrate the reproduction of certain values among the "lads," he neglected to consider the blatant violence and sexism which is explicit in their attitudes and activities. Hebdige, she said, "misses the opportunity to come to grips with subculture's best kept secret, its claiming of style as a male but never unambiguously masculine prerogative" (McRobbie, 1980, p. 43). In addition, McRobbie claimed that Hebdige avoided dealing with the issues of sexual identity which subcultures create within their style and expression.

McRobbie (1991) pointed out that a whole body of literature on the sociology of culture and youth subculture is based on the premise that mass culture is inherently meaningful. People negotiate their way through culture by altering its intended meaning and ideology and adding new ones which can become a form of critique. This notion views culture as a commodity which places the generation of resistance and opposition to it as a matter of consumerism and not

production. McRobbie suggested that girls play a minimal role in the production of their own culture and that they are limited as well in their choices as consumers.

A feminist analysis of subcultures suggests that females negotiate their leisure time and personal space differently than males. McRobbie (1991) claimed that girls orient themselves much more closely toward peer relationships and, for working class girls in particular, toward family and home life. Her research suggested that while girls oppose or resist the discipline and authority of the school, often in ways that are different from that of boys, they tend to accept traditional definitions of female roles.

This is a crucial point to bear in mind when dealing with the issue of teenage pregnancy which reflects both role identity and a measure of adult status. This is the same point that Cusick (1987) argueed in addressing the relationship between sexism and early parenting. McRobbie argued further that teenage pregnancy is becoming more of an issue and is viewed as problematical because of state involvement in financial responsibility of young mothers and their

children. Not only does this dependency have severe implications for males but it points directly to "mechanisms of inequality which, in recent years, have produced and reproduced new stigmatised and disadvantaged groups" (McRobbie, 1991, p. 231). McRobbie's arguments draw attention to the relative powerlessness of women in the production of culture (and subcultures) and the marginalization of women by both the market conditions and the state practices.

Changing Perspectives

Recent research involving students in school settings (Eckert, 1989; Weiss, 1990) provided an opportunity to examine the current state of discourse about culture and resistance and to determine the extent to which various theoretical position are being applied. Eckert (1989) employed, what I consider, a superficial reading of Willis to draw parallels in terms of the characteristics between his "lads" and her "burnouts." This work focused on the social polarization between groups within a school to demonstrate the extent to which they represent stratification along class lines. The theoretical position is all too obvious when Eckert wrote, "Thus a

conspiracy of factors conspires to lead the children of parents of different socioeconomic statuses into strikingly different roles in adolescence, and these roles in time prepare the individuals for their places in adult society" (1989, p.175).

This stance appears to be more in keeping with that of Bowles and Gintis (1976) whom Eckert referred to in discussing the relationship between education and society. The problem with this approach is that it is viewed as rigidly deterministic and has difficulty accounting for change (MacLeod, 1987). In addition, Eckert failed to consider the reproductive aspects of resistance as Willis (1977) did and limited her treatment of oppositional behaviours to discussions about identity. There was, as well, a glaring absence of any treatment of culture and behaviours along gender lines leading to the conclusion that this work had not taken the feminist analysis seriously.

Weis (1990) argued that the effects of de-industrialization or post-industrialization have seriously undermined the credibility of reproductive theories. She argued that the issue of identity formation has shifted away from an emphasis on class

and social reproduction to a focus on a struggle of social movements within cultural fields. She noted that oppositional behaviour in school cannot be analyzed along class lines but needs to be seen as part of students' struggles for identity in carving out personal space. In fact, Weis contended that even though students are victims of economic changes brought about by de-industrialization, they continue to place a high value on the importance of school. Their commitment is questionable, however, in so far as they seem more focused on the form rather than the substance of education, where the end product is more important than the means.

Weis noted that her research revealed changing expectations for males and females as well. Her study suggested that males are becoming much more concerned about the family and home life and females more focused on education and careers. She accounted for these reversals as an indication of responses to the impact of social movements on cultural discourse, especially the impact of the New Right and the feminist movement.

Tanner's (1990) research on drop-outs corroborated a number of points made by Weiss. She suggested that

the issue of resistance may not be as important as researchers such as Willis (1977) made it out to be. Tanner pointed out, "Given that heavy manufacturing industry will be less important as both a source of employment and cultural meanings, we might predict that the behaviour of the 'lads' will come to be seen as less and less typical of the working class as a whole" (1990, p. 92).

In contrast to the study done by Willis and in support of Weis' research, Tanner noted that students tend to place a higher value on the importance of education. What was perhaps even more startling about this research was that it noted that students are much more focused on upward mobility and less concerned about the manual-mental distinction so important to Willis' "lads." Unlike Weis, however, Tanner suggested that there appears to be minimal differentiation along gender lines in terms of life goals, placing equal value on work and females only slightly higher than males on the importance of family.

A cursory review of other research of the at-risk or drop-out population reveals the diversity of interests and concerns and the focus on social theory

or lack thereof in educational discourse. Some studies (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986; and Rumberger, 1987) were more concerned about identifying those students who are most likely to drop out of school and to determine ways in which the schools can implement policies and programs which might ameliorate these factors. While their research suggested that socioeconomic status and ethnicity are primary characteristics of this at-rick population, they pointed to a host of other variables such a behaviour, peer influence, self-esteem, performance and pregnancy as important as well. This suggests that the reasons for dropping out of school are as varied as the individuals themselves. There is only scant recognition of the cultural or class biases of schooling with the emphasis placed on providing programmes which will recover at least some of these students and enable them to function better within the institutions of education.

It is this bias to which Curtis et al. (1992) directed our attention in their study of ability-grouping and streaming in schools in Ontario. They suggested that streaming is "a form of

institutionalized violence" (p. 99) the effect of which is to perpetuate the stratification of students along class and cultural lines as a way of ensuring the privilege of the elite. "Streaming is one way the public educational system restricts access to the advanced forms of knowledge, and legitimates political and economic inequality" (Curtis et al., 1992, p. 102). Developing ways to assist marginalized students to accommodate themselves through various programmes or teaching strategies will do nothing more than "guarantee that dominant class children attuned to the cultural affinities of their teachers and the content of the current curriculum will do better in school than working-class children of similar learning potential" (Curtis et al., 1992, p. 110-11).

This work provided a succinct history of streaming in Ontario and delved into the politics behind the decision in 1992 of the New Democratic Party government to implement destreaming in Grade 9. While criticizing the conservative nature of the Radwanski Report (1988)(as cited in Curtis et al., 1992) supported its recommendation for total destreaming in schools in Ontario. Even though they suggested that this report

arose out of a concern for an increasing drop-out rate, they failed to offer any consideration of this issue. Nelson (1987) was more vocal and dramatic in suggesting that students who leave school are "acting responsibly and rationally. For it is they who are squarely facing both the reality of school boredom and the clear evidence that there is not much compelling opportunity beyond school. By skipping and leaving school at an early age they are 'voting with their feet' to give up the frivolous fantasy of school life" (p. 126)

It has not yet been shown that the shift to technology will produce the number of jobs that it promises or the number of jobs offered by the former industrial-based economy. This suggests, in part, that any discussion about a drop out problem may simply reflect a political motivation and economic expediency, "an ideological diversion" (Fine, 1990, p. 65), that perpetuates an outdated concept about the need and effectiveness of education. After all, what if we managed to have all students complete high school? In the end, the real issue may be to use any dissatisfaction expressed by students to create educational models that suit a society where multiple

career changes, the prominence of service sector jobs, shortened work weeks, unemployment and underemployment may be the norm.

This review of the literature suggests that students' reaction to schooling is saying something about themselves and the institutions that are responsible for education in our society. Specifically what that message may be remains an issue open to interpretation based on rather diverse theoretical positions and research. It remains to be seen whether Fine (1986) is correct in asserting that the message students are giving through their behaviours is a critique of schools, educational methodologies, curricula, and the labour market. There can be no doubt that the changes in market conditions and the transformation away from an industrial based economy will continue to cause consternation and alarm about the future of education. Unfortunately, a detailed consideration of the present economic conditions and potential changes is well beyond the scope of this present research. It may be possible, however, to listen to students in order to determine the extent to which their cultural expressions and resistant

behaviours are a commentary on those economic changes and the role of education.

The following chapter provides an outline of the methodology that I intend to use to investigate student perceptions about culture, cultural production and reproduction and the nature, meaning and purpose of their resistance. The presentation offers some reflection on the primary issues that affect research. In addition, what follows indicates my own ruminations about the relationship between theory and data which impinges on the role that participants will have in the research process.

## CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Paradigm Concerns

This chapter offers a description of the methodological blueprint established for the research with student participants, specifically the recruitment and data gathering techniques. It offers as well a brief explanation of the reasons for choosing qualitative approaches and the attempt to include the impact that work with poststructualist scholars has had on my own attitudes and theoretical positions.

It is not my intent to devote time or energy to lengthy postulations about the benefits or hazards of pursuing research based on a particular methodological position. It is well beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the history of research or to give a recounting of the paradigm wars. I find myself somewhat sympathetic to the opinion expressed by Lather (1990) who said, "Paradigms put order into an untidy universe, but to demand that all inquiry decisions be in line with the worldview embodied in a paradigm is problematic" (p. 331).

It is obvious that there are distinctions between quantitative and qualitative research or various forms of inquiry especially as regards their respective

values, goals, purposes, and methods. As Schwandt (1990) pointed out in reference to the work of Howe (1988) (as cited in Schwandt, 1990), we need to resist the "tyranny of methodological dogma" (p. 276) and remind ourselves that the different methodologies are not only shaped by epistemological issues but fall within relations of power and control within the research community itself. The reality of a pluralistic society suggests perhaps a plurality in terms of research designs and methods which in turn necessitate accommodation among various paradigms that reflect personal and institutional choices and situations (Firestone, 1990).

A number of sources, situations, experiences, and individuals have had varying impacts on the methodology adaopted in my research. A course with Patti Lather one summer introduced me to the work of postmodernists and was enough to convinve me that I would want to try my hand at qualitative research if I ever convinced myself that I could handle the rigours of a thesis. This decision represented as well a reaction against my training in theology which all too often negated subjective analysis in favour of the objective

heteronomous position of "pure doctrine." It also reflects the impact that my reading of Michel Foucault has had on my own interpretation of the work I do as teacher and, now, as researcher.

Foucault's interpretative analytics disrupts the epistemological foundations upon which we build our disciplines, our social and cultural narratives, and perhaps even our research, positing them as constitutes of history within the relations of power/knowledge. Cherryholmes (1988) and Lather (1991a) would both argue that even new approaches can become nothing more than another panoptic device that serves to exert a totalizing effect in objectifying and classifying.

Bourdieu's (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) reflexivity serves to provide similar cautions about the kind of work we attempt to do in research and about the expectations for what it is we hope to accomplish. His reflexive sociology promotes communitarianism and co-operation among all participants in research based on a pluralistic and relational approach that resists differentiation and classification. This reflexivity calls for a hermeneutic of suspicion in which a bit of heresy challenges the doxic structures and practices of

the preconstructed dynamics of fields. Reflexivity also necessitates an awareness of the researcher's own habitus based on social background, academic history, gender and ethnicity. The notion of habitus renders absolute impartiality as an impossibility and requires that researchers objectify their own participation by submitting their research designs and processes to a critical and reflexive lens. At the same time, because habitus is based in part on perceptions of the world and is therefore open to change, reflexive sociology suggests that research projects offer all participants the possibility of a new gaze, a "metanoia," a personal and social transformation.

Mishler (1990) suggested that theorists have recently begun to argue for the primacy of construct validity in research. Cherryholmes (1988) argued much the same point. Mishler advanced the notion that Kuhn's concept of exemplars helps to address this issue of validity by focusing on practice in going about the task of establishing research designs. This focus helps to "reveal science as a human endeavour marked by uncertainty, controversy, and ad hoc pragmatic procedures" (Mishler, 1990, p. 417).

A number of research projects stand out as my own exemplars in terms of practice for this present endeavour. Willis (1977) is critically important because his research has had such far reaching impact and serves as an example of ethnographic study with student populations. More recent projects (Eckert, 1989; Weis, 1990) have attempted to use much the same practical aspects of research as Willis and have served as models for the kind of on-site work I envisage for my own research. While I have not used Jones' (1989) research in my theoretical reflection, her work has had an impact on my perceptions of what I would hope to accomplish and the conditions and situations of which I want to be aware. One of the concerns inherent to Jones' research is the need to address the criticism of social reproduction theories and neo-Marxism and to bring post-structuralist notions of research to bear in creating an alternate design. One is able to plot the various aspects of qualitative research that Jones used and quite able to identify obvious weaknesses when compared with the recommendations of prominent qualitative research methodologies (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Eisner, 1991; Bogdan & Biklin, 1992). What makes

this research important for me is its break with her previous neo-Marxist research and her attempt to try something different. These various theoretical reflections and the focus and approaches of my exemplars served to clarify some of the concerns and issues I had as I began to deal with my own methodology and to inform the choices I made as I set about the task of establishing a research design.

Participant Selection

As previously mentioned, I worked in an alternate education program for five years prior to taking on my present position as a classroom teacher and learning resource teacher in a technical high school with general and basic level programming. Even though I was now longer attached to the program as a staff member, I intended to seek out those students I had encountered during those five years in this alternate education setting to be participants in this research. A number of factors made this choice of student populations more practical. The first consideration had to do with the sheer logistical problems created by a limited time line for the completion of the research phase. This was compounded by my change in postings within the

board which coincided with the planned start-up of data gathering. I felt that it would not be feasible to begin a new teaching position, fulfill the work requirements that this entailed and at the same time recruit a totally unknown student population. I had had contact with these individuals in the alternate education setting for a least a semester and in most cases for a whole school year and my involvement with them during that time provided me with the opportunity to establish a familiarity and ease with them that would facilitate recuitment for a research project.

Yet another factor taken into consideration was the fact that these students represented that part of the student population that most interested me. They had all been referred because they had been deemed at-risk or exhibited behaviours which were most often considered to be resistant. While these students represented a diversity of cultural and social backgrounds, the vast majority of them came from a lower socio-economic status and lived in single parent families. One difficulty was that most of these students were white males although there was a satisfactory number who could be included to provide a

reflection on issues involving gender and ethnicity. The major deterrent to tapping this particular group of students was that those who had remained in school were presently scattered throughout the system which meant that there could be no specific site study and that most contacts would have to be made after school hours.

I decided that this large sample of students would be narrowed from the start by two factors. First, a significant portion simply would not be traceable either because they relocated outside the area or had moved within the community since I had last met them. In addition, I only wanted participants who had attained an age where compulsory school attendance was not an issue to ensure that their decisions to remain in school were their own to some extent. I decided that gender and ethnic background would be a priority for contact and an invitation to participate in the study. My intention was to invite between ten and twelve of these students to participate in this research and to divide that number as equitably as possible between attenders and drop-outs.

This process was indicative of a purposive sampling (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Bogdan & Biklin, 1992)

and was seen as an "emergent sampling design" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 201). I felt that additional informants would be sought out through "snowball sampling" (Bogdan & Biklin, 1992, p. 70) or what Lincoln and Guba (1985) described as "serial selection" (p. 201) and "continuous adjustment" (p. 202) as I moved through the research period.

My general topic and concerns could suggest a fairly "prefigured focus" (Eisner, 1991, p. 176) to this research on students' perceptions of the cultural basis of schooling and their resistance to it. This did not mean that I was unaware of the need to give allowance for an "emergent focus" (Eisner, 1991, p. 176). As Bruner (1986) pointed out, "the research proposal does not really matter, since we usually end up studying something different anyway" (p. 147).

Since prolonged engagement and on-site observation with these particular participants was impossible, I decided that I would depend on interviews as the primary source of data gathering which would be conducted at each student's respective school site or after school hours. I was cognizant of the fact that a different focus might begin to emerge especially if I

allowed for an interview style which provided room for manoeuvring and was open to different areas for investigation.

Having made submissions in September to the ethics committees of both the university and the Board of Education, I decided to use the time available to me to make some initial contacts and to recruit participants for the research. Within the first few days of beginning work at my new placement I met Harold, Tanya, Stephen and Brian (pseudonyms), all students whom I had met while at the alternate education program. I explained the nature of my research and invited them to be participants in this exercise. They all agreed and were told that I would contact them to establish meetings as soon as my proposal had been approved by the two ethics committees. Brian was deleted from the school roles due to poor attendance sometime after this initial encounter. During that time, Marcel, who was now a drop out, came by the school to visit me and agreed to be a participant in the research.

I had met another former student, Mark, at a local beach during the summer and even though he had expressed interest in participating in the research,

had left no means by which I could contact him. While I was still engaged in the recruitment in the fall, I met him again at a local bar. He gave me his pager number and told me to call him when I wanted to arrange an interview. I met two other former students, Carole and Christine, teen mothers out with their children at a shopping centre one Friday night. I explained my research project and they agreed to be interviewed.

Cody had maintained regular contact with one of the other staff members for the past three years and all three of us met occasionally for a meal or a movie. This situation made it relatively easy to make contact and recruit him for the research. His participation would add the perspective of a native student to the research.

By the time I received approval to proceed with the actual research I had managed to make contact with and recruit nine former students. This had been accomplished without too much difficulty even though there was an obvious element of happenstance involved in the process of selection. Other situations and encounters proved less rewarding. One former student whom I met on the street expressed a keen interest in

being a participant but when I tried to call her discovered that she had moved and had an unpublished telephone number. Another student whom I felt would be able to offer articulate information about school experiences and dropping out avoided several telephone calls and did not respond to messages left with family members.

The support offered by my Department Head provided another avenue for recruitment. I had already explained my work to the Principal and he gave me his approval to use school facilities and to meet with students once I had received permission from the Board's ethics committee to conduct research. A number of students who either worked in or visited the Learning Resource Centre regularly overheard the conversations about my research and expressed an interest in participating. My Department Head made several commendations for students who she thought would make suitable participants and by December Gerry, John, and Anne ended up volunteering to work with me. Carla, a sister of one of the Youth Workers I had known in my last year in the alternate eduction program, was recruited in December. She attended another high

school in the city and I had decided that I wanted to hear whether her perspectives were any different from what I had been getting from the other students. The fact that she came from what appeared to be a relatively middle class family and was in enrolled in O.A.C. courses was another determining factor in recruiting her for the research.

Procedures

Since interviews had been one of the data gathering methods used in my examplars and acknowledged in qualitative methodologies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Eisner, 1991; Bogdan & Biklin, 1992), I felt that this was the most appropriate way for me to proceed with my own research. Interviews were conducted throughout November and December. It was important, for ethical considerations, to meet with the informants in public places. I was able to use the conference room in the Learning Resource Centre to meet with those students attending the high school where I worked. Other students and the drop outs were interviewed in local coffee shops. It was much more difficult locating and negotiating a time and place to meet with Carole and Christine, the teen mothers whom I had met at the

shopping mall. Carole was living on her own and there was no way to make contact. We had agreed that I would telephone Christine when I was ready to set up interviews and we would negotiate schedules at that time. As it turned out, Christine backed out of an interview because she had been up late the night before and the next time I called she was not available because her mother was out and there was no one to babysit. I could hear Carole shouting in the background that I could interview them both at the same time and since the logistics were beginning to appear difficult, I decided that this was the best option. I ended up interviewing the two together at Christine's mother's home. Carla was interviewed at her parents' home while they were elsewhere in the house preparing for a Christmas party.

I had decided that interviews would last about about an hour in length but the average tended to be more like three-quarters of an hour. All of the interviews were taped so that they could be transcribed by a professional specifically hired for the purpose. (The participants had been offered the chance to refuse to be taped with the option that I would take field

notes if they found this process uncomfortable.) Due to the possible sensitive nature of some statements made by informants and their continued involvement in local schools, consent forms guaranteed that I would use pseudonyms in all written reports as an alternate means of identification. I also guaranteed that tapes and transcripts would be destroyed after the research was completed.

I also intended to request participants to keep journals so that I could obtain regular and ongoing reflections on their daily activities relative to their experiences in and attitudes about school. Bogdan and Biklin (1992) refered to this method of data gathering as the use of personal documents. Requesting written material of an autobiographical nature also raised ethical considerations in terms of confidentiality. Again, the consent forms guaranteed that all journals would be destroyed or returned to the participants following the research. Bogdan and Biklin pointed out that despite the concern over ethics, journals can be useful in allowing the researcher to provide a focus or topic for informants. The seven students attending the school were I worked all agreed to provide written

journals over the period of the research. They were requested to reflect on their experiences, to provide a written account of what they considered to be important and their feelings and thoughts. They were asked individually about the commitment they could make to this task and most agreed to make five weekly submissions beginning with the interview date. I had to constantly remind them about entries and, in the end, only three students ever provided me with written material and then, infrequently and sporadically.

I decided that one of the data gathering techniques I would use was to involve the participants who consented to take part in group interactive sessions. Two group discussions were held after watching films (Lean On Me and To Sir With Love). I felt that these discussions could provide a means of gathering a rich and valuable supply of information about culture and attitudes to schooling by allowing students to interact with the material and with each other. The high school students where I worked agreed to participate in this exercise and the location offered readily available private space. Group discussions turned out to be quite frustrating due to difficulties in negotiating

suitable times. Some teachers were reluctant to release students from classes because of their attendance patterns and most of them were unwilling to remain after school. After the first discussion, which proved to be difficult to orchestrate, I resorted to promising pizza and soft drinks as an added incentive to persuade participants to stay until 4:00 p.m. Stephen, Tanya, and Harold showed up late and once the pizza had been devoured seemed less inclined to join in the discussion. John did not show up at all and had used his release from class as an opportunity to skip the last period of the day. I kept field notes on these two discussions but my entries had more to do with process than content.

Field notes became another source of data gathering. This method was used to varying degrees in my research exemplars. Bogdan and Biklin (1992) suggested that field notes are a valuable source of data that are both descriptive and reflective and offer helpful instructions about the process that could be used in preparing them. Lincoln and Guba (1985) seemed to suggest that a separate reflexive journal should be kept by the researcher as a means of recording the

bases of decisions and processes used during the research. I perceived no substantial difference between the methods offered by Bogden and Biklin and Lincoln and Guba and for reasons of economy of time opted for combining both description and reflexivity in one journal. This document was used in the process of an independent audit (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) as one way of meeting the criteria of dependability and confirmability in establishing trustworthiness and countering investigator bias. This also represented an attempt to incorporate aspects of Bourdieu's (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) reflexivity, most specifically his call for the need for researchers to objectify their own participation. My advisor seemed to be the most obvious choice in this regard and by sending her copies of my own notes I was able to have my process scrutized and to receive suggestions relative to content and direction.

Beyond Phenomenology

These various data gathering methods were intended to support the credibility or the "structural corroboration" (Eisner, 1991, p.55) of this research through the technique of "triangulation" (Lincoln &

Guba, 1985, p. 328). Interviews, field notes, participant observation and personal documents reflect the standard and relatively established methodologies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Eisner, 1991; Bogdan & Biklin, 1992) which are the tried and true sources of data in qualitative research of an interpretative or naturalistic nature. My research into methodology indicated that a strict adherence to these approaches could produce a rather myopic view of research by failing to recognize and adequately represent the continuing debate about methodology (Lather, 1986a; Lather 1986b; Gitlin, 1990) which raises epistemological and emancipatory issues from a critical perspective within qualitative research. In much the same way that Bourdieu's reflexivity invited transformation, this critical element challenges researchers to question the ways in which participants are treated in research by inviting conscientization as one of the desired outcomes of our designs.

The past relationship with most of those who were participating in this research was a vital issue for me personally, affecting things such as how interviews would be conducted and the extent to which these people

would be involved in the research. Even though I knew a number of individuals' stories which would allow for a very open-ended interview process, because of the rather restricted topic I decided that I had to keep my own interview questions relatively structured by using an interview schedule (Appendix A) as suggested by Bogdan and Biklin (1992). I felt that it was important, however, to take into consideration their caution that too rigid a control of the conversation by the interviewer could defeat the purpose of qualitative research. McCutcheon and Jung (1990) suggested that phrasing more critical questions can add an emancipatory element to research by allowing participants to engage in personal self-reflection in responding.

While my prefigured focus was obviously to gather information about student perceptions of culture and resistance, I realized that students would probably provide information and suggestions which would allow for emergent foci (Eisner, 1991, p. 176-7). Eckert's (1989) research is a good example of this emergence of the unanticipated. As Spradley (1979) said "Rather than studying people, ethnography means learning from

people" (p. 3). Rigid attempts to systematize research in the defence of some kind of methodological rigour could be seen as an attempt to wrap qualitative research in a positivistic structure (Anderson, 1989). Gitlin (1990) suggested that in the same way that teachers end up silencing students, so researchers can silence those who participate in research. Action research addresses the concern about silencing by raising important epistemological issues and insisting on the opportunity for participant voices to be heard in telling stories and setting agendas. Anderson (1989) suggested that Lather's (1986a) efforts to alter our understanding of construct and face validity and the epistemological foundations and the orientation of research and offers a critical or emancipatory dimension for participants, including the researcher.

Lather (1986a) suggested that face validity is more than simply member checks designed to address a credibility criteria of trustworthiness as recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Face validity cannot deal adequately with the issue of false consciousness (Lather, 1986b) and should probably be viewed more importantly as a means by which participants assume a

more active role in the actual research. Lather's (1986b) discussion of catalytic validity addressed more specifically the issue of a critical perspective in research.

I decided that the use of group discussions and more probing questions in the interviews would be appropriate ways to address these various issues and concerns. While I used my schedule as a basic guideline, interviews tended to be more conversational in the hopes that students would be more willing to set the agenda for discussion. Some of the interviews where participants took the initiative in talking about issues that concerned them went very well. Other interviews, especially with individuals with whom I had not managed to establish a rapport, ended up being more structured. Stephen's information tended to be in the form of one word responses which made data analysis difficult. In reviewing the trancript I became keenly aware of the extent to which I had unintentionally phrased questions in such a way so as to allow this to happen. I attitubted this to the fact that I was a neophyte at this process and decided that it was best to consider the interviews that I deemed as

unsatisfactory as part of a learning experience. I also built in member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in order to add a critical perspective. Participants were asked to read the transcripts of the interviews to determine if there was anything that they wanted added or deleted. None of the drop outs were willing to arrange a time for me to deliver transcripts to them. Those students at the school were told when they were available and in two cases transcripts were given directly to the participants. Neither one had any comments and I found a copy of one student's transcript left partially read lying on a table in the Learning Resource Centre. I was more intentional with the analysis write up and made several copies which were handed out to students and other participants thus ensuring that I had an adequate supply in case they were not returned and providing everyone with at least the opportunity to provide suggestions, criticisms, and commentary.

Geertz (1986) wrote, "Whatever sense we have of how things stand with someone else's inner life, we gain it through their expressions, not through some magical intrusion into their consciousness. It's all a

matter of scratching surfaces" (p. 373). This served to offer both comfort and caution to me personally as I began the research process. Having already engaged in extensive reading on the issues of culture and resistance, I needed to be cautious that I did not end up constructing data around preformed expectations of what should be found (Eisner, 1991). This is what Lather (1986b) called "the sin of theoretical imposition" (p. 262). This made students' expressions and voice all the more important. It also emphasized the role that my advisor played as my peer debriefer or my independent auditor, or my "discussant" (McCutcheon, 1990, p. 283), in monitoring my research through my field notes/reflexive journal.

Limitations

I recognized that one limitation to this research was that a dependence on interviews might not have yielded as much or the kind of information that I wanted or needed. Students might not be forthcoming in talking about their experiences in school. I decided that, on the one hand, this was less critical than I thought it would be if I kept before me a sense of emergent foci generated, in part, by the stories

participants wanted to tell. On the other hand, I was simply hopeful that the relationship that I had already established with them and the fact that I knew so much about their personal histories would serve to overcome any doubt or hesitation on their parts.

Yet another limitation had to do with "prolonged engagement" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301). The three months that would be committed to data gathering seemed insufficient and inadaquate. Eisner (1991) suggested that "the question is not so much the length of time as the quality of the evidence the research has to support descriptions, interpretations, and appraisals" (p. 192). Here, my own experience and the previously established contacts with the students/participants would again prove to be crucial.

A third limitation that continued to worry me throughout the research process had to do with generalizability. The sampling and the method of presentation were open to criticism from those who might suggest that this study would not provide concrete analyses, recommendations and conclusions which could be transferred to the overall student population. Such seemed to be an issue for one of the

reviewers on the school board's ethics committee who was reported to have commented that there was not much in the research that was of an educational value. My response to such criticism is that it reflects, in part, a rather limitied purview. Moreover, it indicates a distinct predilection toward issues and methods which are of minimal importance to me in this present process. Eisner (1991) talked about "naturalistic generalization" (p. 103) as a way to learn from nonrandom experience in consciousness raising. "No one leads life by randomly selecting events in order to establish formal generalizations. We live and learn" (Eisner, 1991, p. 104). This has been helpful in desensitizing me to formalistic concerns even though those who know me well realize the extent to which heteronomy continues to influence my own perceptions and analyses. I, too, am engaged in a personal and social struggle against "sense-making efforts which aspire to universal, totalizing explanatory frameworks" (Lather, 1991b, p. 155).

Foregrounding analyses and frameworks are the lived experiences of young people who make their own sense out of the institutions they encounter daily.

The following chapter explains how I went about the task of constructing the information the participants in the research offered about those experiences.

## CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS

Bogdan and Biklin (1992) warned that there is no particular data analysis process which can detract from the difficulty of the task. This chapter provides a brief discussion of the rationale for adopting certain strategies and the ways in which I went about organizing the data.

Tanner's (1990) research included an interview and questionnaire design which allowed her to create categories around specific issues such as reasons for leaving school, career ambitions and life goals. Using a similar approach in this research would have facilitated the process of data analysis. The problem with this, of course, was that it would have preset the parameters of the research and suggested the imposition of limits on those who participated in the research. Lather's (1986b) warning that "theory is too often used to protect us from the awesome complexity of the world" (p. 267) served to remind me that I needed to guard against creating predetermined categories or theories that acted like receptacles into which data could be conveniently poured.

Bogdan and Biklin (1992) made much the same point when discussing the exploration of literature while in

the process of gathering data. Their suggestion that the neophyte researcher should wait until the data have been assembled before beginning the analysis is one way to counter the tendency to impose expectations on the data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) pointed out that data are the constructions of the various sources involved in research. Data analysis becomes the task of reconstructing those constructions.

I decided to follow the suggestions provided by Bogdan and Biklin (1992) in going about the process of data analysis. The first thing I did was read through all the transcripts to create coding categories based on words, phrases, patterns and events that stood out as repetitive. Fifty categories were created in this way and each one was assigned a number so that in the process of rereading the data from informants I could indicate the category in which the units of data seemed to fit. Some units suggested more than one category and were designated as such while others suggested that categories needed to be changed. Bogdan and Biklin (1992) suggested as many as thirty to fifty category codes should be established initially and that the process of categorizing the units of data would

necessitate that some of these be eliminated, in part, out of design and, in part, out of the natural reduction in the analysis process.

After the categorization process was completed, I cut up my notes so that units of data could be placed in envelopes specifically marked for each coding category. Where there was an overlapping in categories, copies of units of data were made. These units of data were then organized into schemes and patterns, creating in effect subcategories. Each individual unit of data was glued to sheets of paper marked for each specific category. This organization of data provided the framework for the actual writing process.

While these particular methods facilitated the organization of data received from informants, it did not alleviate the stress and anxiety in constructing that information in a formal written document. The sheer volume of data necessitated additional editing during the writing process by eliminating repetition and allowing some statements to stand as representations of a number of different voices. The matter-of-fact way in which the method for analysis is

described does not lend itself to a full description of how labourious and time consuming the process was. What follows is the product of those efforts in my construction of the stories and opinions expressed by those who consented to be participants in this research.

## CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS

The methodology chapter describes in some detail how I went about recruiting participants for the research. I begin this chapter by reviewing the "cast of characters" so that some brief background information is available. This chapter is a construction of the information provided by those informants. Information is organized around the various categories created during the data analysis phase of the project. Rather than present individual stories in the way of case studies, this chapter presents participant voices on issues which were created as categories from the research.

### The Participants

Harold, Tanya, and Steve were all former students when I worked in the alternate education program and were in attendance at the technical high school offering basic and general level programming where I started work in the fall of 1994. John, Gerry, and Anne were students from that same school who consented to be participants during my recruitment phase. Cody attended another school and was recruited because of my past contact with him in the alternate education program. Brian, Carole, Christine, Mark, and Marcel

were drop outs and were all former students in the alternate education program. These participants all come from middle and lower economic backgrounds, living with single parents or, in the cases of the drop outs, living on their own. Carla, who was an O.A.C. student, attended another high school and was recruited toward the end of the research period. Her background and experience lends a distinctly different voice in some sections of this chapter.

## The Purpose of Education

Students were amazingly single-minded when it came to talking about the purpose of education or what they hoped to achieve. Mark, one of the first people I interviewed, seemed to set the tone for what I would hear over and over again by suggesting a connection between education and jobs. "Education is for better skills when you go for a job. Everybody knows that. When you finish high school you get a better job than you would get if you only had a Grade Nine education" (Interview, Nov. 2, 1994). What was surprising was that this individual was not even attending school and yet echoed many of the responses I would hear from others. When asked what he hoped a high school

education would accomplish, Cody said, "What's it going to accomplish? It's going to accomplish hopefully a diploma and maybe like an art or something. I don't know" (Interview, Nov. 12, 1994). Cody went on to talk about the importance of an education by creating an analogy. "Say this floor right here is job opportunities. You go to high school without a high school diploma and you get like four or five squares. With a high school diploma you get like ten. With a college degree or whatever then it opens up. With university it opens up even bigger" (Interview, Nov. 12, 1994).

Reflecting on this same concern as well as the present economic conditions, Tanya said: "If I don't go to school, I have to get a job. Generally I don't mind but right now there are no jobs out there I could get, especially for a drop out" (Interview, Nov. 24, 1994).

Even though Christine, a teen parent talked about the ability to escape child rearing responsibilities by attending school, she also identified this connection between an education and jobs. She said that she could "get away from my kids. I want to get my high school diploma and then get a job" (Interview, Nov. 19, 1994).

Carla, commenting on her teachers' concerns, indicated that she felt that they were directed toward "getting your diploma and encouraging them (students) to go further in their education" (Interview, Dec. 10, 1994).

My own personal reflection made after this interview pointed out this emphasis on credentialism. "Carla's information confirms rather than disconfirms what I had been hearing all along. Students seem to place very little value on the specifics of what they may be doing in any single class and see them more as stepping stones toward graduation and the all-important diploma. An individual class only becomes important in the overall issue of marks and averages which affect entrance requirements into various post-secondary institutions" (Field Notes, Dec. 10, 1994).

Students did identify other aspects in the general topic of the purpose of education which they considered to be important. Cody pointed out: "You have to have a general idea in everything. Like you take science and, you know, when you have kids some day and your kids are sick then you know what's going on with them, right? And the doctor tells you something. And you take

accounting. You learn how to manage your money. You take, like I don't know, you take law and then you know your rights or something" (Interview, Nov. 12, 1994).

John, who was actually commenting on his skill deficiencies, seemed to be offering some kind of discussion about the purpose of an education other than a diploma. "I'd like to see myself being able to speak with better grammar. Speak better in front of people. Not just talk like some bum. I don't know. I don't really like math very much but I'd like to see my math skills better" (Interview, Dec. 13, 1994).

Tanya told me that she felt that education was "suppose to better me" (Interview, Nov. 24, 1994). When asked to explain "better" she said, "Like some things you do need to know about, science and stuff like that. Your math you need to know because, well, math is used everyday" (Interview. Nov. 24, 1994).

A discussion group on the movie <u>To Sir, With Love</u> provided an opportunity to talk about the importance and purpose of education. "I asked about the purpose of education by quoting the teacher's line about 'duty to change the world'. In the midst of this discussion, Steve got up out of his seat, rolled up a sheet of

paper like a trumpet and started shouting 'the future of mankind'. He walked about a lot after this and commented that he was feeling hyper. They all joined in a general discussion about being able to survive and the need for an education. Tanya commented at one point that an education doesn't guarantee survival and I heard her say to Steve, 'Money is power, not knowledge.' Anne turned to me and said that an education helps you to support yourself" (Field Notes, Dec. 19, 1994).

Although Gerry suggested that a high school education was important to get into college, he indicated that it had become a personal goal that he had set for himself. When asked what he hoped to get out of a high school education, he responded, "a better job or maybe even college. Then after that, I don't know. It's an accomplishment because I guess I never wanted an education and now I do. It will make my life easier I guess. Set a goal for myself" (Interview, Nov. 15, 1994).

Students were often loath to criticize the education system and unable to point out substantive failings or weaknesses or to suggest areas for change

and reform. Brian offered this comment: "They expect you to be the way they want you to be" (Interview, Nov. 22, 1994).

Carla pointed out that she did not understand the criticism levelled at the school system. "I don't really understand why they're criticising it so much. Like, I don't see a problem with it. I think it's good. I think the school system is fine. I don't see a problem" (Interview, Dec. 10, 1994).

After an interview with Cody in which much the same comment was made I wrote, "I asked for final comments he would like to make and we were able to talk about how the school system might be changed. Cody seemed surprised that I would ask such a question. I am surprised that it is not something that he's thought about. I wonder if students have any political sense especially in bringing about reform. His response indicates a distinct inclination toward status-quoism" (Field Notes, Nov. 12, 1994).

In trying to elicit responses from a discussion group to the political issues brought out in the movie Lean On Me, "all the participants said that they were uncertain as to what I meant. They were more vocal

about the social issues, commenting on the drug problems and the involvement of the teachers with students" (Field Notes, Dec. 2, 1994).

Making Something out of Myself

Very few participants in the research reflected the attitude of Marcel. "For me education for me would have to be in the trades" (Interview, Nov. 6, 1994). The majority of students not only addressed the importance of earning a high school diploma but saw it as critical for further studies. Brian, who had been deleted from the school rolls for lack of attendance, offered this comment: "You need a college education to get something nowadays. You could say that if you only have a high school education you really won't get anywhere. You might get a job at GM or something like that, but overall not a very good place. With college you can get better jobs in a hospital, a doctor, a lawyer. If you can get a hairdresser you can still get a job, you can open your own business" (Interview, Nov. 22, 1994).

The value students seem to place in furthering their education was voiced Gerry. "My goal right now is to get my diploma and then after that maybe work for a

bit and then go to college and get something to fall back on or something like that" (Interview, Nov. 15, 1994).

This aspiration to college (even university, in some cases) or owning one's own business seemed to reflect a firmly held belief in personal success and progress. Marcel stated it this way: "The most important things about school? Ah, well actually, get your education and, you know, try to make something out of yourself and, ah, you know, try to make your family and people kind of proud about ya" (Interview Nov. 6, 1994).

Marcel went on to say "Basically I'm hoping by the time I'm 25 I can actually, you know, I can actually start to move somewhere else, like go to the next level. Ah, that's that way I look at it. I look at different levels" (Interview, Nov. 6, 1994).

Christine, who is presently parenting, told me that she felt that an education would allow people to "do something with your life. Nobody wants to be on Mother's Allowance forever" (Interview, Nov. 19, 1994).

Cody told me that "If I'm not in college or university I want to have a job and a home and,

hopefully going in the right direction" (Interview, Nov. 12, 1994). When asked what right direction or wrong direction might look like he said, "The wrong direction is not having a job and living off assistance or something like that and, you know, being a bum and drinking my life away. So, I wouldn't want to be doing that." The importance this plays in his life was reinforced when he made yet another reference to being a bum. "I hope I don't quit school and I hope I become something when I get older. I don't want to be a bum."

John expressed the same thought. He said that it was important to "become something when you get out of school. You know, not just sit around and become a welfare bum" (Interview, Dec. 13, 1994).

I heard this negative impression about social assistance expressed by Marcel who was talking about his failure to continue on in school. "It makes me feel restricted in a way, but it does make me feel good that, you know, I am working and I am actually doing something with myself instead of sitting on the welfare role and being a bum" (Interview, Nov. 7, 1994).

Harold also expressed a concern about improving himself and seemed to express genuine fear about the

results of failing to complete high school. "I didn't know that like you can't get a proper job without at least a Grade 12 and before I was screwing around I didn't even take that into consideration. Like now I see all these people around the street. I don't want to be like those people" (Interview, Nov. 30, 1994).

Getting Out

For all the talk about the need for completing high school and getting a diploma, students often voiced a certain degree of frustration about the amount of time it took for all this to happen. Students often expressed the situation as an issue of urgency. As Gerry put it, "School is needed. The sooner you get out the better" (Interview, Nov. 15, 1994).

When asked why his classes were important John said, "Because I want to graduate. I want to get out of here" (Interview, Dec. 13, 1994).

The concern about the amount of time it takes to complete high school was expressed by Marcel. "My main reason for leaving school I guess was I was getting somewhere but I was getting somewhere too slow and I messed up too bad and everybody knew me and the teachers knew me and like they expect, like to me it

seemed like the teachers expected me to be this certain somebody like this, they expected me to be the, ah you know, kind of like the clown" (Interview, Nov. 6, 1994).

This latter comment seemed to reflect an impression that one of his reasons for leaving was because he felt that he had worn out his welcome in his schools. This did not seem to affect his impression about the need for an education and he was able to express his aspirations for returning to school at some point in time. Here, again, Marcel was able to talk about his frustrations with the amount of time it would take to complete his high school education. "I do want to be back in school. Eventually I will be back in school. Maybe next fall or the fall after that or something like that. But one of the reasons I never went back to school is because, um, I wasted a lot of time in school like, you know, I should be graduated by now but like I messed around a lot, I wasted a lot of time and right now I feel I'm at the age where I have to start doing something with myself..." (Interview, Nov. 6, 1994).

This age factor and completing high school was

expressed by other participants as well. Harold said, "I'm seventeen. I'm supposed to have almost graduated and going into college, maybe a year, next two years, whatever. Now I'm going to be in high school for a long time because I screwed up before" (Interview, Nov. 30, 1994).

Christine, one of the teen mothers participating in the research, said about completing high school, "It's going to take me forever. Chances are its going to take me even longer than that.." (Interview, Nov. 19, 1994). At one point she talked about her experiences in an alternate education program operated by the board and concluded her statement by saying, "For us to go back into regular classes now and sit with all those really young kids--now, I'm eighteen years old and going into a Grade Nine class! I don't think so! Wrong!" (Interview, Nov. 19, 1994).

While talking about those people who have stayed in school, Mark, a school drop out, said, "They're doing the right thing. They're doing it fast. I wouldn't say that there's a certain speed you should go to it but they're doing it fast and getting it over with" (Interview, Nov. 2, 1994).

Getting in a Few Laughs

This hardly seems like a fitting title for a subsection dealing with what students find relevant and meaningful in their daily studies and classes. It came to me anonymously from one of the students who participated in the research. "But today was good so far. Got to wach (sic) a movie got some good laughts (sic) in today, and im (sic) not that tyerd (sic) so the day went good" (Journal Entry, Undated). This serves not only to elicit questions but also addresses as commentary what some students are looking for in their routines at school. Brian, who has had a chequered attendance pattern over the past three years, talked at length about school activities. "When I go to school I really have nothing to look forward to. Like, I used to only go to school if there was something to look forward to like a movie or something like that. When I was at the _____ everybody said that I used to come just for the days when we went swimming or something and I guess that was one of the reasons, too. That's why I went to school, just to go swimming, go bowling or something like that. For the movies. Never any other reason" (Interview, Nov. 22,

1994).

Students actually complained only sparingly about the courses they had to take. Cody commented, "It's just that I have a hard time taking like four Englishes" (Interview, Nov. 12, 1994). Again, it was Cody who complained, "I take science and I don't like it. I don't think it's an amazing class but they say it's compulsory. I have to take it. I have to have two of them. I only have one so I'm taking it again. What am I going to use science for? What do I need to know what body cells are for or whatever? But I have to take it" (Interview, Nov. 12, 1994).

This lack of perceived relevancy was commented on by Marcel as well. "Like, you know, if I want to learn about history I'd go talk to my grandfather, someone like that. I don't know. But to sit there in a class for eighty minutes out of the day with someone saying, 'OK, well you know the War of 1812,' you know, like everybody you know remembers the war. A lot of people got blown away, a lot of people got killed. Ah, um. It's good to know about history because it might scare people today to get into a war but it doesn't matter. Someone is going to have a conflict, they're going to

have it" (Interview, Nov. 6, 1994).

Whether this is a criticism of the courses or the content and delivery was difficult to determine. Again, it was Marcel who complained, "But you're just sitting there in a class, like say in one class, history, and you have to prepare for eighty minutes sitting there writing things off the blackboard and listening to the teacher, blah, blah, blah, chatting away and going on and on and on about this stuff. That puts a big damper on wanting to go back to school" (Interview, Nov. 6, 1994).

This was not the only criticism levelled at pedagogical style and content. John was talking about an altercation with one of his teachers. "Since Grade Nine I've always had the same English teacher and that's all I ever did was crossword puzzles and watch movies. I mean, I came right out and I said I want to learn something. I'm just doing crossword puzzles and watching movies. I'm not learning anything. And I guess the teacher got upset and so that was the end of it" (Interview, Dec. 13, 1994).

Whatever relevance there was to be gained from what might be classified as academic subjects depended

on practical and useful applications as explained by Marcel. "The Maths, the Englishes and History and Geography will help me through life, you know, to budget my money, to be able to read and write and speak with the proper whatever" (Interview, Nov. 6, 1994).

What was typically identified as meaningful and relevant or interesting and exciting were the physical education classes or the technical studies. The particular interest varied as much as the number of individuals who participated in the research. In part, this is not surprising since all of the students save one attended a technical high school. John seemed to be speaking for most of these students when he explained that what made a class exciting was "being up and doing things instead of sitting at a desk writing" (Interview, Dec. 13, 1994).

Anne's comment seemed to clarify the point: "There are students that like to do hands on work instead of doing academics like math. They like doing autobody. They learn a lot more, I think" (Interview, Nov. 30, 1994).

Marcel seemed to offer the most telling comment about students' commitments to their classes. "I guess

it all depends what kind of person you are, what kind of goals you want, what kind of things you like. Like me, you know, I like Phys. Ed. I like Auto Mechanics. I like trades" (Interview, Nov. 6, 1994).

I was still often left wondering what was really important, especially in the light of a comment like Cody's. "The credit is valuable in my situation but not the class. The class is not valuable to me but the credit is though. I could use the credit, so" (Interview, Nov. 12, 1994).

Carla, an O.A.C. student participating in the research, did not help to clarify what students may perceive as important and valuable in their classes. At one point she stated, "Like, when I'm in class or what not I'm not thinking I have to get my diploma. I'm thinking I've got to do good in this course. I need the mark" (Interview, Dec. 10, 1994). Elsewhere in the conversation she said, "Like I need to get those grades to get into university and from what I learn at school apparently it's suppose to really help me in university" (Interview, Dec. 10, 1994).

Somehow it feels appropriate to conclude this subsection by returning to the same student I quoted at

the beginning. "I wolck (sic) up late for school but I was only five minnuts (sic) late (sic) My 3 perid (sic) was cindou (sic) boring (sic) But besides that the day was good (sic) Oh and one more thing (sic) the foot (sic) in the cafe (sic) sucked at lunch (sic) it did not look to apelling (sic) to day (sic) But (sic) Besides (sic) that my day was good. Noting (sic) to iciting (sic) hapend(sic)" (Journal Entry, Undated).

Attitude and Motivation

One topic or theme that surfaced in a number of conversations had to do with attitude. Harold, who at sixteen had earned only three high school credits, attributed attitude as the main source of his difficulties in school. "Well, I wasn't too serious back then. But I was but not as much as I am now" (Interview, Nov. 30, 1994).

Cody saw attitude as the major problem he has even now. "I don't take it that seriously. Not right now anyway" (Interview, Nov. 12, 1994). Cody's comment about motivation showed some confusion about the attitude he felt he ought to have and the way he actually felt about school. "Well, it's not playtime....I should do, I'm going to do good, but the

motivation's not there....I know I have to do really good. I should be really good in high school, but, I don't know" (Interview, Nov. 12, 1994).

Mark and Brian, both drop outs, were able to specify an area involving attitude about their lives in school. Mark said, "I think students feel like their independence has been taken away. You know, they don't feel they're as independent as they would like to be" (Interview, Nov. 2, 1994). Brian said, "I like being independent about myself, doing my own thing" (Interview, Nov. 22, 1994).

Gerry, who had set completing high school as a personal goal, would insist "But I, you got to make that own decision for yourself, if you want the education or not" (Interview, Nov. 15, 1994).

For Gerry it also seemed to be a case of maturity. When talking about people who quit school he said, "They haven't looked at life yet. They're too immature I guess or something. They live in a totally different lifestyle than I am.....They just don't accept school for what it is, I guess. They're not looking at an education" (Interview, Nov. 15, 1994).

Yet, students provided differing opinions about

the issue of maturity and the high school scene. Marcel felt that he would do better if he returned to school in an adult setting. "I think it would be a little bit different in an adult program because, ah, people have matured to that certain age to want to go back to school....most of the people in there, you know, are adults so most of them have grown up by then" (Interview, Nov. 7, 1994).

Anne, on the other hand, pointed out that one of the difficulties she had moving from elementary to secondary school was that you were expected to act more mature. "You have to act older when you're not older. It's just really weird" (Interview, Nov. 30, 1994).

Fitting in and Self-Esteem

Attitudes and feelings about school came out in other discussions in what I have called fitting in and self-esteem. Anne talked very frankly about this issue. "My high school experience in Grade Nine was the worst. I wasn't used to the people, different, how can I say it, different place compared to my other school from elementary. I was uncomfortable, I didn't fit in and I didn't know anyone and I dropped out" (Interview, Nov. 2, 1994). She was able to personalize

her concern at another point in the conversation and tied things together with feeling about her self-esteem. "I think it was the students that was, like, being teased and, I don't know. Because I was chubby back in Grade Eight, Grade Nine, and it was really hard for me to go to school and try to fit in" (Interview, Nov. 2, 1994). She also talked about her work with the youth worker in her school. "I'm helping right now with this self-esteem group. I wish I had this when I was in Grade Nine. It's working wonders with these girls" (Interview, Nov. 30, 1994).

Marcel related a similar scenario in terms of personal feelings in a conversation about his attendance problems: "I was always like the little guy and I always seemed like, you know, I didn't know what everybody else did and plus I had an older bother so he picked on me and all his friends used to pick on me through school and, ah, in a way I had a hard time making friends..." (Interview, Nov. 6, 1994). Marcel, a drop out, also talked about feelings of self-worth and the prosepct of returning to school. "I would like to be treated the way I would treat someone else. Um, like not be looked down at while this guy, you know,

hasn't been in high school for a good many years and now he is back. He's just a loser" (Interview, Nov. 6, 1994).

When Brian talked about his inability to attend school and those who stick with it I asked him what the difference was. He suggested, "Self-esteem, I guess. I don't know" (Interview, Nov. 22, 1994).

Gerry talked quite openly about his early fears when he first entered high school and the affect that had on his performance. "See, the reason I didn't show up a lot was because there's always somebody bigger at high school and I was afraid of him. Like, I never fought in high school. I haven't got in a fist fight yet and I won't and like, it scared me when I first went to _____. Like, they're all bigger and there's always fights and I don't know. People picking on Grade Nine's and stuff so I tried to avoid school" (Interview, Nov. 15, 1994).

A couple of people were able to connect feelings of self-worth with particular behaviours. When Anne talked about the joking around she use to do in class she mentioned, "You know, it helps get your self-esteem up.." (Interview, Nov. 30, 1994). Mark discussed his

own feelings of self-worth and the arguments he had with his teachers. "It kind of makes me feel better if the teacher yells at me to yell back would make me feel better because a teacher yelling at me makes me feel like the size of a smurf. I won't go for that" (Interview, Nov. 2, 1994).

Sometimes You Have Bad Days

Just because students did not talk specifically in terms of self-esteem did not mean that this was not an issue affecting their behaviours. Gerry talked about his avoidance of school. "Wouldn't go. Scared to get out of bed. Stay home everyday just about" (Interview, Nov. 15, 1994). While at one point in our conversation he talked about this in terms of his fears involving the sheer size of other students in high school, at another point he discussed his learning disabilities and the effect that they had on his feelings of personal self-worth. "I wouldn't want to get, go to class because I was embarrassed because I didn't want people to know that I couldn't read or couldn't write, or like spell" (Interview, Nov. 15, 1994).

Cody related his feelings of inadequacy with his behaviours in school. "Oh, yeh, and another reason why

I also misbehaved a lot too was because, ah, in school, if I didn't understand something and I couldn't understand it, I would try to cop out of it. I'd try to get the teacher mad at me, sending me out of the room or, you know, or just leave me alone" (Interview, Nov. 12, 1994).

When asked to describe how he acted in class, Gerry explained, "Always talking. Never did my work. Scribble in my binder. Sleep, ah, just try to get other people to come, like, bring down to my level and get other people in trouble with me. That's the kind of stuff" (Interview, Nov. 15, 1994). At another point he gave additional descriptions of his conduct in school. "I punched a teacher once. We had screaming matches a lot. Leaving school. Never showing up for a grade in school" (Interview, Nov. 15, 1994).

This contest of wills between students and teachers showed up repeatedly in conversations. Anne described her experience with two teachers in particular with whom she had difficulty. "We didn't see eye-to-eye. I don't know. I was really mouthy then. You know, when I walked by" (Interview, Nov. 30, 1994).

Harold related a more specific situation involving much the same scenario. "Well, it would be like, sometimes where the teacher would start badmouthing me or get lippy with me. I just wouldn't take it. I'd just tell him where to go and whatever and then it just...I guess by me not backing down to him and I just made the situations worse the next time we had an argument or whatever" (Interview, Nov. 30, 1994).

Mark related a similar situation. "I remember a time when principal was accusing me of doing something wrong to the school. Damage or some other thing and I would, me being perfectly innocent, I screamed right back at him. I'd lose it. I'd just fully go bonkers on the person and make my point of view and get it across and then I would cool down" (Interview, Nov. 2, 1994).

Tanya explained her relationship with teachers in her school experiences quite simply. "I have a bad reputation for telling the teachers off" (Interview, Nov. 24).

Other situations talked about by students were more often than not described in terms of deliberate attention seeking devices. "Sometimes I would cause

trouble. I would just ignore everybody and be rude, like clown around. I paid more attention to making people laugh than my own work" (Interview, Nov. 22, 1994).

Marcel talked about his behaviours in class as clowning as well...."sit there and tap my feet in class or drop a pencil here and there, you know, try to irritate the teacher or if the teacher would turn around, you know, start talking to the person beside ya, um, just basically trying to be like this class clown, trying to make people like you..." (Interview, Nov. 6, 1994).

Cody, while he talked about similar behaviours, related them to his feelings about the class. "Not do my work, socialize, if it's like a boring class and do nothing but write. It gets boring" (Interview, Nov. 12, 1994).

A number of situations described by students involved what they perceived to be an escalation of situations by teachers. John reported one incident where this occurred. "[The] teacher would say 'Why are you late?' I'd make up some stupid excuse [and the] teacher would get upset. Then, I'd get upset and we'd

just keep yelling at each other and then I'd just leave" (Interview, Dec. 13, 1994).

Harold talked about these situations in very general terms. "I used to get in trouble, right? But it wasn't nothing major but they going on, like the little stuff I was doing was major, like, making the stuff I did into something it really wasn't. I got, you know, in a fair amount of trouble, but when I did other things it wasn't nothing, you know, to get all stupid about" (Interview, Nov. 30, 1994).

Cody talked about the situations in similar terms when a principal got involved in his classroom altercations. "Well, it started out goofing around and then when the authorities stepped in then I'd be an asshole and then I guess it would be a problem with the authorities, but it wouldn't start out like that all the time" (Interview, Nov. 12, 1994).

Almost every student could describe numerous situations where they cut classes or decided to avoid school altogether. Only Carla, the senior O.A.C. student participating in the research, indicated that she had never skipped, suggesting, "It's basically people who, um, school doesn't really seem all that

important to them. They, like, they don't really seem to care whether they go to university or whether they go to college or whether they have a good job. It's more they want to have a good time" (Interview, Dec. 10, 1994).

An element of truancy did seem to involve an opportunity to get away with friends. John said, "Somebody will come up and say, hey, you want to go do this. It doesn't sound that much fun, how about this? OK, sure, let's do that" (Interview, Dec. 13, 1994).

Brian also reported the impact that his friends had on his attendance. "I use to skip classes 'cause most of my friends skipped classes. They used to skip school. They used to go to the arcade next door" (Interview, Nov. 22, 1994).

For some students, truancy seemed to have nothing to do with getting away to have a good time. Mark stated, "I can't say I don't go to school because of the drugs and the fights. I guess I don't go to school because I've never had a history of really going to school. Ever since I've started elementary even I was truant" (Interview, Nov. 2, 1994).

Anne also reported the impact of her early school

experiences on her attendance. "I skipped a lot. I didn't care for school since I was in Junior Kindergarten. I've always, even in like seven and eight, I hated it. I would try to sleep in.....I was so terrified to see what would happen or what will happen if you don't do this or that" (Interview, Nov. 30, 1994).

Just how serious an issue truancy is was difficult to gauge. Students tended to be very unspecific about the amount of time away from school or individual classes. Cody suggested, "Lately, it's been a lot, but on average, like, I'd skip like five classes a week" (Interview, Nov. 12, 1994). Anne indicated that in her first semester in high school she "made twelve days out of eighty-eight" (Interview, Nov. 30, 1994). Harold reported, "When I wasn't serious I'd go half the time and skip the other half or I'd go later or whatever" (Interview, Nov. 30, 1994). One student wrote, "I was tired and not feeling to (sic) hot but I came to school anyway. I tried to sign out but they wouldn't let me. Sometimes it bothers me when they wont (sic) let me sign out. Only because I'm eighteen and Im (sic) an adult (sic) so I should be able to sign out. But on

the other hand its (sic) good because if I could sign out I would probly (sic) do it all the time" (Journal Entry, Nov. 21, 1994).

The Peer Factor

Truancy and skipping classes raised the issue of the impact and importance of peer relations and attitudes toward schooling. In talking about his education, John commented, "I don't know. It seems it's not as important as just making friends and hanging out. Hanging out seems a lot more important than school" (Interview, Dec. 13, 1994). One of the teen mothers no longer attending school said the same thing. "I was more interested in hanging out instead of going to school" (Interview, Nov. 19, 1994).

Brian pointed out the importance that peer relations had on his attendance. "I was hoping to get in classes with my friends so I had something to look forward to going to school to meet my friends and all that" (Interview, Nov. 22, 1994). At the same time, he blamed his friends or his choice of friends for the effects they had on his attendance. "They were all skipping school so if I hung out with the right crowd I bet I would've stayed in school" (Interview, Nov. 22,

1994).

Gerry attributed a lot of the problems around attendance to the effects of the peer group. "There's peer pressure in high school. Like, 'You going to skip or you going to class. Or, you're not going to skip, thanks.' You know" (Interview, Nov. 15, 1994).

Much the same situation came out in a conversation with Carole, another one of the teen mothers. "I mean we could go to school together and we would for the first couple of months, but after, you know, if I didn't feel like going then I'd tell Christine 'I'm not going today' or whatever and then she would go 'I'm not going, then.' You know" (Interview, Nov. 19, 1994).

Peer influence was not only important in terms of skipping or truancy. There was the much broader issue of social contacts. Cody commented, "Socializing is important, but it's not that important. Shouldn't be, but it is, I guess" (Interview, Nov. 12, 1994).

Carla, the one student who claimed that she had never skipped a class, pointed out that school space is important for peer liaising. "That usually happens in the cafeteria. 'What are you doing tonight? Well, let's do this.' Um, people who have spares do it then.

If you're in the library, what not" (Interview, Dec. 10, 1994). Of course, there are other places where students can congregate to perform the functions of peer bonding. "I have found Anne visiting other students in the hall outside the LRC or outside the building...This area is protected from the elements and makes a perfect student sanctioned 'smoke hole'. One student usually stands guard looking in the glass door to watch for who might be coming"(Field Notes, Nov. 30, 1994). As the researcher, I was becoming aware of the importance of the school site for social contact formations based on what students were reporting. "Schools are important places for social contacts where plans are made for after school activities or to develop support groups" (Field, Notes, Dec. 12, 1994).

A couple of students talked about the relevance of peer support. Steve said, "I can talk to my friends about problems. I never talk to my mother" (Interview, Nov. 7, 1994).

Anne told about an incident with a student she knew and the difference in the interactions between peers and adults. "I know a student right now who has a teacher. All he does is cuss and cuss and cuss at

her and...but when he sees me in the hall he's like 'Anne, Anne, look what I do'. You know, this kid's after me. He's like so good with me. He doesn't yell or swear at me" (Interview, Nov. 30, 1994).

Still, for some students, the inability to establish significant peer contacts and the fears associated with group socialization is enough to deter regular attendance. Before she managed to work her way back into regular attendance and had found her own support network within the school, the fear of her peer group severely affected Anne's attendance. "I kept to myself a lot, but I didn't have friends" (Interview, Nov. 30, 1994).

Mark talked about his discomfort by saying, "I was never the type to really like being around kids" (Interview, Nov. 2, 1994).

Equally important is the location of the social group. Christine pointed out that the fact the most of her friends did not attend school affected her own attitude. "While they are out doing other things during the day I have to be in school, so I didn't like that" (Interview, Nov. 19, 1994).

A telling tale about attendance and social

contacts was given to me by one of the students in her journal. "I got her at lunch. So I signed in and went to see my boyfriend in his class. He went to my house this morning and I was sleeping so I wanted to see if he was mad at me. He wasn't though. We made beds in health care and I got to lay in them so that was fun. Did hair in hairdressing, I didn't learn anything new though (sic) So today was a good day too!" (Journal Entry, Nov. 22, 1994).

Drugs and Alcohol

Only Brian related his behaviours directly to substance abuse, indicating that there was a period when he spent time "usually getting stoned and going to class causing trouble before I go to class" (Interview, Nov. 22, 1994.)

Getting stoned and going to classes seemed to be something that Steve did on more than one occasion. Relating an incident where he had been suspended for showing up for class stoned, he said, "It's just, I don't know. It's just, the point, usually I don't get caught. Usually it's not noticeable. Except for last Friday I was a little bit ripped" (Interview, Nov. 7, 1994).

Like Steve, Mark indicated that he, too, would go to classes stoned because of the effect it had on him. "You're more relaxed. You're not all tensed up and things going through your head. Open for more ideas. LSD I didn't like going to school on" (Interview, Nov. 2, 1994).

For Cody, drugs or alcohol involved truancy and skipping classes. "I'd always be, like, like partying was better than school. Um, I don't know. Like, if my friends were going out to get, like vodka or something, I'd go out. I wouldn't go to school. There might be some days that I'd just sit around and get drunk all day and wouldn't go to school at all. Wake up, get drunk, go to sleep, wake up, get drunk. Wouldn't go to school for a week" (Interview, Nov. 12, 1994).

The extent to which drugs and alcohol were a part of these people's lives was emphasized in the difficulties that were created in establishing interview times. The situation involving Steve was mentioned previously "I encountered him with a group of students during their lunch smoke break on Friday and asked whether he'd be willing to be interviewed that afternoon if I cleared it with his teacher. He told me

that he was suspended until the following week because he had shown up stoned to class" (Field Notes, Nov. 7, 1994).

Much the same situation came up with Mark. "I contacted Mark on Tuesday night. He told me that he was on his way to getting stoned and drunk" (Field Notes, Nov. 2, 1994).

When I picked up Cody for a scheduled interview, "He told me that he had just arrived from Hamilton where he had spent the evening and was hung over" (Field Notes, Nov. 12, 1994).

Steve presented a rather ambivalent attitude about his drug use in school reflecting on a point his teacher had made about the kind of example it might set for other students. "It's not funny. Well, yeh, it is funny. I think it's funny. But I understand the point that I should have more responsibility than coming into school stoned. If I can get away with it. If he can get away with it why can't I?" (Interview, Nov. 7, 1994).

Even though John only hinted at his own personal use of drugs or alcohol, he offered this explanation: "Mostly the reason people are doing it is because

they're not supposed to. They're not supposed to, so they do it. It's like, if your parents tell you not to do something, you're gonna want to do it even more because you're not supposed to" (Interview, Dec. 13, 1994).

For Steve, who at nineteen considered himself more mature than most students in his high school, drugs and alcohol were not problems issues and seemed to be a matter of personal choice. "It's not a problem. Drugs and beer aren't number one on my list. I still do them, yeh. Just like, there's no need for it but I'm going to do it" (Interview, Nov. 7, 1994).

Class Consciousness

During a group discussion after watching To Sir, With Love, I decided to raise the issue of class as it is presented in the movie. One student asked me what I was talking about. My field notes written that night expressed my frustration. "I was amazed at their lack of appreciation of social class and education. I guess social class is not talked about very much in history classes any more and certainly these students are unaware of its existence and importance" (Field Notes, Dec. 19, 1994). In the process of analyzing the data

gathered through the interviews, I began to wonder whether my statement was an accurate assessment. When talking about experiences in different high schools, levels of programming or their various social contacts with peers, these students often gave voice to a recognition or awareness of distinct differences.

Tanya transferred from an Advanced/General Level high school about a year ago in order to attend another school that was generally promoted as a specialist in technical studies. She made this comment about her initial experiences in her first high school: "They were all rich and they have their own cars. They're all stuck up. There were only a few people there that actually were pretty decent that I could get along with" (Interview, Nov. 24, 1994).

Brian, who had attended this same school at one point, offered this analysis: "They don't worry about how hard it is because they know what they're going to be and they know they're probably going to make it. They don't have to worry about it" (Interview, Nov. 22, 1994).

Mark, whose only regular high school experience had been at the one attended by both Tanya and Brian,

was talking to me about how "bogus" the school system was. In the process of explaining to me what he meant by this term he made the following comment: "I'm not going to use a dictionary term for bogus. I'm not sure. Bogus usually means dumb or, you know, not liked. So, and it's just getting more bogus especially from people that have truancy problems. There's going to be more of those too in the future, I would think. Unless you're a brainer and you want to have a million dollars by the time you're thirty and you want to be the rich type of person and then you do the education as the Board requires you to do it" (Interview, Nov. 2, 1994).

Gerry had suggested that one of the ways to improve the reputation of his technical high school was to bring advanced levels into the regular programming. He offered this impression of schools where all three levels are offered: "You wouldn't see too many basic students around or even basic modified students, like, anything like that. They'd skip school like I did. They'd just avoid it" (Interview, Nov. 15, 1994). While clarifying what he meant he pointed out, "They didn't want to be made fun of or they don't want to.

It's a pressure when you got to go to school everyday and you think how many people are going to make fun of you today or pick on me today because I'm in Basic Level" (Interview, Nov. 15, 1994).

Feelings of personal worth associated with program level were also alluded to by Harold. "It guess it makes [him] feel smart or stupid by what, you know, put him in" (Interview, Nov. 15, 1994).

The effects of streaming in such areas as career goals, personal aspirations and peer encounters were touched on by a number of students. Gerry talked about the Basic and General Level programs in his technical high school. "You can get a trade there and you can also go to college out of _____ which isn't bad. But you are more or less looking at a trade than anything else than to go to college" (Interview, Nov. 15, 1994). Gerry also talked about his impressions as to how streaming affects the ability to fit in with other students. "Other schools, if you are in basic you probably wouldn't fit in with like, certain people. They'd make fun of you" (Interview, Nov. 15, 1994).

Carla, the O.A.C. student who attended a high school with all three streams, would have contradicted

this impression. "I really don't find a big difference in who hangs around with who" (Interview, Dec. 10, 1994) and yet, the fact of streaming obviously affected her own peer group. "The majority of my friends are in advanced because I meet them in my classes, but there are a few who are in general level" (Interview, Dec. 10, 1994).

Anne discussed the reputation the high school had in the community and how that made her feel occasionally. "Well, there's the odd student that says you go to Coconut College. Pardon me, you haven't been there. If you haven't gone there, you shouldn't know what it's like. I go there so don't say anything about it. I defend the school. It's hard sometimes because there's like, I don't know, maybe there are good looking guys or something around" (Interview, Nov. 30, 1994).

Of course, a number of students told me that they have a very simple way of deflecting the ways in which education and programming affects their personal or social lives. As John said, "We try not to talk about school" (Interview, Dec. 13, 1994). Gerry was somewhat clearer on this point. "It bothers me so I usually

don't even talk about school outside school except for things that were funny that happened or something like that. But nothing else. A lot of people don't even know that I'm in the Basic Level" (Interview, Nov. 15, 1994).

Two students made very specific comments about destreaming in Grade Nine and offered quite different perspectives. Anne, who attended a technical high school, argued, "With the Grade Nine transition that should be cut out, thrown out. Um, it's not giving them the right way of learning. Like, they're growing up, they don't understand they are actually growing up. It seems like they're still in Grade Eight. They're not at the high school level yet. They don't take it seriously" (Interview, Nov. 30, 1994).

For Carla, an O.A.C. student at a mixed stream high school, the issue seemed to be one of academic integrity. "I don't know if I would like it because I would assume that they would have to negotiate somewhere a compromise, either the courses become easier for people who are used to advanced levels or it would become harder for people in general and basic and maybe the people, if it was easier, then the people in

advanced might not be getting the education that they would like or general and basic level might have a hard time with it. I don't think I'd like it" (Interview, Dec. 10, 1994).

The Issue of Violence

By and large most students participating in this research would suggest that violence was not a significant problem. Most of them would probably agree with Carla. "I would say it's basically a Toronto problem right now. Maybe it will spread down here, but I don't see it down here" (Interview, Dec. 10, 1994).

Speaking from his own experience, John pointed out, "I really haven't heard of a lot of violence from this school but drugs are fairly heavy in this school" (Interview, Dec. 13, 1994).

When talking with a group of students after watching Lean On Me, the main focus of the conversation was on the amount of violence portrayed in the movie. All the students indicated that they would leave a school before having to be subjected to the kinds of violence depicted in that situation. I made mention of this in my field notes. "I was surprised by the unanimous focus on order and discipline. Mark, in one

of the first interviews I conducted, suggested that one of things that need to change was that schools needed to be stricter. I have observed almost every one of these students engaging in some form of activity which infringes on the rules and regulations laid down by the school. Somehow, truancy, cutting classes, smoking on school grounds, hanging out in the halls or coming to classes stoned aren't issues which get personalized when reflecting on the issues of the movie. I wondered whether the real issue isn't one of personal safety rather than discipline. A number of students have raised that as important in the interviews" (Field Notes, Dec. 19, 1994). Anne seemed to reflect a typical response on the issue of personal safety. "I've never seen a weapon at this school and by God, if there was, I'd be out of here" (Interview, Nov. 30, 1994).

A few students were able to talk about violence which they had experienced. John willingly admitted that he "fought a lot when I was younger" (Interview, Dec. 13, 1994). His present method of dealing with frustrating situations in classes is to "go out, punch a wall or bang my head off a locker or something and

then it's all better" (Interview, Dec. 13, 1994).

Carla talked about a stabbing that occurred at her school a few years ago but actually raised the issue in terms of the bad press she felt her high school often received from the local media by contrasting the publicity that incident received and the lack of coverage when someone was raped at a local Catholic high school. Her basic point was, "I feel perfectly safe at my school" (Interview, Dec. 10, 1994).

Mark's perception of violence in schools was perhaps the most pronounced. He seemed to want to relate it to situations in which drugs were involved but moved quickly to describe more general experiences where fighting was the issue. "There's too many pushers in school and it's just getting more and more. Also a lot of antagonists that like to pick fights. Tough guys that want the whole school to be on their side. You know them at the start of the school. There is no real way to avoid that unless you want to destroy your reputation. If you run away from a fight then your reputation goes down the tubes" (Interview, Nov. 2, 1994).

This staking territory and establishing a

reputation was also talked about by Anne. "I've grown a reputation here that, OK, that's Anne. Don't bother her. She'll probably kick your butt" (Interview, Nov. 30, 1994).

At other points in the conversation, rather than talk about specific situations, students talked about the causes of violence. John, for example, said, "It's like in the community nowadays nobody gets along any more, everybody's fighting over something. You're either white, somebody doesn't like you because you're white. You're black, somebody doesn't like you because you're black. If you wear different clothes and somebody doesn't like you you're going to get beat up for it" (Interview, Dec. 13, 1994).

Anne pointed out, "People don't know how to take a joke and then it gets serious and becomes a real fight, a fist fight" (Interview, Nov. 30, 1994).

Gerry, the student who punched one of his teachers, said, "Well, at _____ there's violence because that's how the students take their anger out, I guess" (Interview, Nov. 15, 1994).

John, who reported that he was violent when he was younger, explained it in terms of lived experience.

"Just pretty well the surroundings around me. Violence at home and just things around me" (Interview, Dec. 13, 1994).

Anne was more precise in describing the root of violence. "Because some students have been through rough family living. They never communicated with the parents. They don't know how to communicate with other students besides fighting. They don't understand what communication is other than violence and violence is cool. They were never taught a proper lifestyle of younger students that should have been and a settled home, both parents getting along with each other" (Interview, Nov. 30, 1994).

The Home Environment and Support

Most students were ambivalent when it came to describing the amount of support they received from home. John was perhaps the most enthusiastic in talking about the interest his mother expresses in what happens in school. "She's kind of proud because both my older brothers either dropped out or got kicked out by Grade Ten, so I'm the only one that's actually made it this far. So, she understands that I get in these little conflicts and, I guess she's just proud that

I've actually gotten this far" (Interview, Dec. 13, 1994).

Other students could not report similar situations. Steve indicated that his mother's interests in his attendance at school was tied into social support. "She gets me up in the morning. If I don't go then she'll totally freak on me, but that's just because she doesn't want me to lose all the benefits" (Interview, Nov. 7, 1994). Steve, who had pointed out the importance of his friends over family, commented further on the contact with his mother. "I'm never home really so we don't really get to talk that much. I only get to talk to her in the morning and when I come home at night. Usually when I come home at night I'm usually ripped (Interview, Nov. 7, 1994).

When asked about parental support Christine talked about her mother's intimidation. "She used to make me go to school. Drive me there, pick me up, walk me in, threaten me, beat me up" (Interview, Nov. 19, 1994).

Mark just talked about the absence of what he felt as genuine or honest support. "My father and my mother never really pushed me all the time to, like, say, well, go to school and learn, do this or do that. I

never had anybody to push me or motivate me" (Interview, Nov. 2, 1994).

When asked about home support, a number of students talked instead about home situations. Cody described the separation between his parents and the impact that had on his school life. "When my dad, like, took over and my mom left, it was, like, yeh, go to school, do good and all that, but by then I was on drinking binges and stuff and it was just a point to get to school" (Interview, Nov. 12, 1994).

Marcel provided a long and sometimes rambling discourse about his home life. "I was living with my mother till about thirteen and then we were going through some problems; then I was living with her and my dad on and off and then from my mom once I hit the age of seventeen ah, me and my mom weren't getting along so I moved out and I moved in with my dad and my stepmother and that time I was going to _____ and then, uh, from there I, uh, well, they came up to me and said to me that, ah, they think it would be a good idea if I left home" (Interview, Nov. 6, 1994).

Carla's description provided a marked contrast to what I had heard from other students. "If I get a good

mark on a test or whatever they say 'that's good,' you know, 'way to go.' If I get a bad mark then they say, 'Why next time you'll know not to do that again,' if you didn't study enough or you thought you were studying the right thing but you weren't and they say, 'well, next time you'll know'" (Interview, Dec. 10, 1994).

My own notes provided another area of support and encouragement for her school life which Carla might have overlooked. "We concluded the interview just as her parents reappeared to leave for their Christmas party. There was a brief conversation about which car Carla would take to go to work (Field Notes, Dec. 12, 1994).

Teachers

It was not surprising to find that students brought up the topic of teachers when describing their experiences in the school system. Most of the criticisms of teachers centred on issues involving respect and acceptance. When Anne talked about problems with schools she said, "It's not really the school system. Maybe it's just the teachers. They don't understand the students...This student got beat

up the night before and didn't want to talk to no one and the teacher made him sit way in the back of the class for no reason or maybe because he wasn't talking" (Interview, Nov. 30, 1994).

Cody said, "They dictate. You can do this, you can do that, you can't do this, you can't do that. You know what I mean? It's bullshit" (Interview, Nov. 12, 1994).

Brian talked about what he felt some of his teachers thought about him. "Some of them thought I was a pain in the ass and stupid" (Interview, Nov. 22, 1994).

Cody seemed to feel that teachers often overreact to problems. "I'd like to see teachers be more, be more calm. Like, you do something wrong and it's like the end of the world. Oh, my God, you know, then the principal's office. And it's just a little deal. Not a big deal at all and they make it a big deal" (Interview, Nov. 12, 1994).

Anne also emphasized the need for understanding. "I think it would be nice if they start being more involved with the students by, well, not really involved, but knowing. So if the student comes in one

day and started cursing, the teacher might understand, or just yelling or whatever, understand what's going on" (Interview, Nov. 30, 1994).

Tanya offered the most scathing condemnation of teachers I had heard when she talked about the first high school she attended. "All the teachers were, like, they were there for their job and that's it" (Interview, Nov. 24, 1994).

Tanya gave a totally different impression when she talked about her present school situation. "You can relate to the students here better. Most of them have the same problems you do. Teachers are better. They're not here just for their job. They're here for the students, too. Everything around here is different, the school, teachers, the kids, everything" (Interview, Nov. 24, 1994).

Anne seemed to confirm this and emphasized the importance of teacher acceptance in helping her to cope with school. "I started working harder and the teachers gave me chances which helped me. If they didn't give me any more chances, I wouldn't be here. I'd probably be out on the streets somewhere" (Interview, Nov. 30, 1994). Then there was the story

about the supply teacher that seemed to emphasize the relationship that is established between a classroom teacher and the students. "Oh, and then a teacher was away (sic) the class acted like animals (sic) but if the regler (sic) teacher was there the class wold (sic) not acted (sic) like they did (sic) so that started my day off real good (sic) ya right!" (Journal Entry, Undated).

The Minority Experience

Three of the participants in the research provided information about ethnic experiences and the school system. Harold talked only briefly about the experience as a black student in his high school suggesting that he would have had different opportunities if his mother had moved to the United States, thereby indicating a feeling of resignation about the opportunities and chances to study Black Culture in this particular Canadian setting. "I have no choice. This is where I got to learn. I have no choice so I got to take it in and do what I can with it" (Interview, Nov. 30, 1994).

Cody felt that there were lots of opportunities provided for him to explore his aboriginal heritage.

"In the school system, like the people from the Native Society come in, see how you're doing and, you know, kind of help you out and see what's going on. I got jobs from them and stuff like that" (Interview, Nov. 12, 1994). When asked whether he had ever experienced any prejudice in schools, he responded, "I don't know. In some ways. I don't know. Not really, like, not from anybody like teachers or anything like that" (Interview, Nov. 12, 1994). Most of the feeling of prejudice came from his social contacts outside school with his friends' parents who he said sometimes told their children "I don't want you hanging out with that drunken Indian" (Interview, Nov. 12, 1994).

Most of the criticism of the school system's inability to address minority issues cam from Anne. "I've always hated history because, like, I never learn about my culture. Never. It's about the World Wars or whatever. Nothing about the Indians, but everything else" (Interview, Nov. 30, 1994). She went on to talk about her involvement with the local Native Group and indicated that it was the main source of information for her about her culture and ancestry. What was her opinion about school? "It's a white man's school.

There's no Indian schools around. If there was, I would be going to it" (Interview, 30, 1994).

Hopes, Dreams, and Expectations

This final section is an amalgam of a host of other categories which tended to be too specific to offer much by way of detail. This kind of catch-all category permits a closure of this chapter by focusing on where these young people see themselves heading in the years ahead. John offered one description of how some people view the situation: "They see their friends or somebody that know that's graduated and they're not doing nothing now. They just sit at home and collect welfare and drink all day. So they figure what's going to be different about them when they graduate so why even try?" (Interview, Dec. 13, 1994). Yet, John did not see this description applying to himself. "Because I can see myself in the future. I can see myself having a good life, having a good job. I figure if I don't do good now I'm not going to have that chance later" (Interview, Dec. 13, 1994).

This optimistic outlook about themselves and the future was repeated by a number of other participants as well. Tanya said, "I think by the time I'm old

enough to get out of the house things will be changed. Things have changed now. There are some new jobs out there. They are just little businesses, you know, that give people a job so they can afford other things which means another business goes back in which gives more people jobs and eventually GM will probably go back" (Nov. 24, 24, 1994).

Anne gave a much more personal projection of her hopes and dreams. "Very wealthy. No. Well, it's going to look a lot better than what is now. It's going to be a fulfilled life that you've always wanted that you can actually get your goal and do and just feel good about having that goal" (Interview, Nov. 30, 1994).

Marcel did not see the future in quite the same way but implied a sense of prospects and possibilities. "There is no guarantees in life. You know, like for all I know an accident could happen to me tomorrow and I'll be, I won't be able to work ever again, you know, um. But no, there is never any guarantee and you just got to do what you can and uh, if you play your cards right and you keep striving for it or try to get somewhere, you'll do it" (Interview, Nov. 6, 1994).

The kinds of jobs they saw themselves doing in order to have this future were as varied as the individuals involved in the research. Anne said that she hoped to be an art teacher, Tanya, a bartender and owning her own bar. Carla was the most specific and based her career choices on volunteer work she was doing in her high school. "I'd like to be in social work. Um. I'm kind of thinking about working in a rehabilitation centre right now or maybe working with the special needs children again" (Interview, Dec. 10, 1994). The two teens mothers were uncertain about what they wanted to do but were unanimous in wanting something that paid lots of money.

Two of the males were very definite in the kind of work they wanted. Mark said that he "found a fondness for hard labour" (Interview, Nov. 2, 1994) and Marcel, who recognized the limitations imposed on him without a high school diploma, fancied himself in a trade. "Without ah my education, without ah having my high school diploma um that restricts, restricts me from a lot of jobs. Ah it keeps me down to the point where um like basically right now I am a labourer and that's the only thing I can do for a while because I do not have

the papers or nothing saying what trades I have or don't have...I won't work in a donut diner, you know. It's got to be labour or something like that cause I got to at least make like $8.50, $8.00 an hour or something like that (Interview, Nov. 6, 1994). Even though Gerry said that he did not know what he wanted, he suggested that he could see himself working in construction.

Brian said that he wanted to be a hairdresser and preferred to own his own salon "But if I have to work for somebody else in the meanwhile then I'll do it" (Interview, Nov. 22, 1994).

Harold, who had some difficulty looking ahead to career possibilities went for his interest in sports. "I don't know if I can see that far but I'd like to just have a teaching job somewhere and teach or coach a basketball team in school" (Interview, Nov. 30, 1994).

Steve, who indicated that he always had a dream of becoming a police officer, reflected his concerns about his personal future. "I don't know if I'm going to be here. I don't know if I'm going to be living" (Interview, Nov. 7, 1994).

Two of the males offered quite contradictory

pictures of their career options. John talked about his interests in and outside school. "I like landscaping but for the past couple of years I've been working at a summer camp with disturbed children with Big Brothers Association and I just love working with kids" (Interview, Dec. 13, 1994).

Cody was able to run off a number of possibilities for his future, college, university, social work, law school but wondered how realistic these were for himself. "But I'm probably dreaming, but if nothing else comes, then I'll just, like, try to be like an iron worker like my dad" (Interview, Nov. 12, 1994).

Most of the students who participated in the research indicated that a relationship and family life figured in their futures. Although they might have been indefinite about when they anticipated that might happen, most of them felt that it would be a situation they would want within the next ten years. John, alone among the males, expressed ambivalence about being on his own or being in a relationship. "I can see myself still with my mom. I can just see me and my mom living together" (Interview, Dec. 13, 1994).

Of the females, Carla sounded so career focused

that everything else in her life could easily be put on hold. "Everything else [would] just flow into my life. You know, like, whether I'm married or not I'm not really concerned about that right now" (Dec. 10, 1994).

Gender Roles and Issues

The discussions about hopes and dreams for the future, especially as they narrowed in on family life, provided some information on how these young people viewed gender issues. Marcel was the only one who stated that he wanted to have a life that was different from what his parents had. "Like growing up when I was a kid, you know, my mother and father, you know, they weren't getting along, they were separated so many times, they go back together so many times and they divorced and everything like that and me I try to keep myself from having a life like that. Like, you know, I want to be able to actually whatever girl I settle down with I want to actually be with her for the rest of my life, have kids, you know have a good job" (Interview, Nov. 6, 1994). After our interviewed concluded, Marcel and I talked about many other issues. I made a note of one of these exchanges. "He talked about being able to take care of [his girlfriend] Helen. I asked whether

this was important to him. He said, 'I know it's not part of the nineties' but it was what he wanted. When I asked how Helen felt about this he mentioned that she wanted to have her own job and a sense of independence" (Field Notes, Nov. 7, 1994).

Steve indicated that he fully expected his wife to stay around the home: "Well for the first years till the kids are off to school" (Interview, Nov. 7, 1994).

Carole and Christine, both teen mothers, talked more about the difficulty they experienced in getting involved in new relationships. Carole said, "I'm sure there's some out there that want to have little children, but guys I run into got kids of their own anyway so. They have kids now. But then you have to, well you're going to get married, well that's a lot of. I don't want no kids that aren't my own" (Interview, Nov. 19, 1994).

Christine seemed more concerned about material comforts. In looking to her future she saw marriage as a possibility but "not necessarily, you know, if that happens down the road. A nice house, a nice car, nice stuff" (Interview, Nov. 19, 1994).

Carole pointed out that one of the problems she

encountered with males, especially in the ways in which they took advantage of her social benefits, was that "It's like having another kid. You have to support them and take care of them. It's not worth it. I don't want to spend on somebody else either" (Interview, Nov. 19, 1994).

Tanya was the only one through the interviews who articulated an awareness of gender issues. She described a confrontation in a class with one of her teachers. "Like he'd treat the guys way better than he'd treat females. If I had my hand up and a guy had his hand up he would go right to the guy first. It would happen, like, every time. And then if another guy put his hand up after that guy got answered then he would go to that guy and if there wasn't any guy left to answer the questions then he'd come to you. It just really bothered me" (Interview, Nov. 24, 1994).

The clearest expression of gender issues came in a group discussion after we watched To Sir, With Love. "When I asked about the gender bias Susan asked what I meant. When I quoted Thackery's speech to the students they all got into a discussion about attracting the opposite sex. Anne commented that 'They're still

trying to push that' and went on to say, 'When girls have sex with sixteen people they're sluts but the guys are cool. It hasn't changed at all.' Tanya said that females have made progress but males just haven't accepted it. Harold seemed to agree with the comment, 'You can't hold 'em down. They're too independent'" (Field Notes, Dec. 19, 1994).

Summing Up

A comment by Cody seemed to sum up the overall concerns about education and their futures. "There's not much time before you have to make, like, decisions where you want to go and what you want to do. Do you want to be homeless? Do you want to live on welfare for the rest of your life or do you want to get a job and working" (Interview, Nov. 12, 1994)?

This comment seems to offer a reflection of the immediate issues facing these students and the questions and apprehensions they have as they try to deal with them. Of special significance is the way in which education helps and fails to help them confront these issues and the consequent degree of relevance and importance they attribute to it. The final chapter will provide an oportunity to discuss these issues and

concerns with those of the theoreticians and to offer some conclusions that might prove beneficial in the ongoing debate about education.

## CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter provides an opportunity to return to the literature reviewed in a previous chapter. The theoretical portions and the information from participants provide an opportunity for a discussion of the central issues and concerns of this research. Involved in this presentation is an attempt to formulate conclusions and recommendations and to indicate where additional study is required.

Participants tended to indicate overwhelming support for the need and value of schooling for success in life. The specific reasons given for this support centred around the opportunities that education gave for further studies or to gain employment. Even the most dissatisfied students I have worked with over the past several years have consistently voiced much the same opinions. Recent statistics about school drop out rates (Fennel, 1993) might suggest the general population recognizes the relationship between education and employability in the current job market.

While participants did not suggest that education was a guarantee of employment, they certainly tended to see it as a necessary resource in competing for available work. This belief in the value and

importance of education seemed to hold firm even when confronted by suggestions that unemployment will probably remain high and that the prospects are dim for many high school students finding full-time high paying jobs in the markets of the future (Valpy, 1994). These more dismal prospects were countered by appeals to the practical importance of education in providing options, Cody's tiles on the floor analogy (Interview, Nov. 12, 1994) and blatant optimism that jobs would become available for them either through changes in market conditions or through their own perseverance.

I was suspicious about this evaluation, however, especially as participants talked more fully about their experiences in school and what they had to say about their various classes. Students often talked about the need to complete high school, earn the mandatory number of credits and then get out, an expression that seemed to me reminiscent of someone serving a prison sentence. They expressed concerns about the amount of time it took to complete high school and the fact that the type of courses they had to take were often beyond their own control and personal preferences. Their devotion to the importance

of the process of education was also suspect given their descriptions about truancy and skipping classes.

Here, of course, sharp distinctions were obvious between Carla, who was enroled in O.A.C. courses and was preparing to attend university, and many of the other participants. Carla claimed that she had never skipped classes and wondered about the commitment to schooling, future education, or careers of those who skipped regularly. Even Carla, however, would not delineate any purpose of a high school education beyond the need to obtain competitive grades which would facilitate admittance into a university or college. What seemed common to all participants was not a focus on the process of education but the completion of a set of criteria which produced the credential which was necessary in order to move on to other things, be that further education or the work force.

This perspective reflects in part the same findings reported by Weis (1990) and Tanner (1990), specifically in terms of the valuation of education. Weis (1990) questioned the commitment to education claiming that students emphasize form over function. This was apparent among those who participated in this

research. What is most evident is that the credential of having attended and completed school is more important and more valued than the process by which it is obtained.

Barlow and Robertson (1994) argued that the present conditions indicate a marked change in attitude about schooling. "The premise that education is about creating alternative futures has been discarded: instead, we are to teach students to cope with an unavoidable future of known, frightening characteristics" (Barlow & Robertson, 1994, p. 143). While Barlow and Robertson heralded the work of reformers like Dewey in advocating the democratization of educational practice, their discussion offered, what I consider, a myopic view of the actual structures of the education system. Their analysis of Canadian education offered only a limited recognition of the history of the connections between schooling and the economy. One is led to believe that the connection between the economy and the education system is a recent phenomenon. Despite the fact that they offered some suggestions about the extent to which schools have acted as reproductive technologies, it would appear

that they want to argue that the move through the last few decades has been toward a more egalitarian notion of education based on the work of people such as Dewey.

Participants in the research appeared unable to articulate experiences and reflections which indicated an awareness or a criticism of the social reproductive aspects of the education system. Brian's comment, "They expect you to be the way they want you to be" (Interview, Dec. 10, 1995) may be the closest anyone came to offering an analysis which indicated an awareness of the systemic ways in which the education system acts as a technology of reproduction. The discussions about streaming were the best opportunities to explore how students perceive social and cultural reproduction at work in schools. A divergence of opinion was obvious in the comments made by Carla and the other participants. Carla, who tended to view education as the great equalizer, spoke about streaming according to ability as of no consequence in differentiation among students. Yet Carla was quite negative when discussing the recent efforts at destreaming Grade Nine and suggested that the elimination of levels may lead to compromises in

instruction and course content which could be detrimental to the education of some students. The vast majority of students, however, saw the effects of streaming as something quite different. They talked about categorization and separation according to ability level as something which affected how they felt about themselves in comparison to other students, especially those who were enroled in academic level courses. The students in attendance at the technical high school offering classes at the basic and general levels often voiced a degree of comfort in being in a school with students with whom they felt an affinity, socially and academically. Students streamed into programs at these levels might dream about being able to attend a university or community college but were keenly aware of the limitations and restrictions placed upon them in terms of future educational goals and career options. As Gerry said, "You are more or less looking at a trade than anything else than to go to college" (Interview, Nov. 15, 1994). This fits with the interpretation of the effects of streaming in stratifying and classifying student populations (Curtis et al., 1992).

Participants who had been streamed into basic and general level courses talked freely about their learning disabilities and behavioural problems. What often surprised me was the extent to which they accepted personal responsibility and ownership for the difficulties they experienced in school. Rather than reacting negatively to streaming, many students voiced a strong preference for being in programs or even a school where they could escape from the social stigmas or performance anxiety that might be experienced in some settings. A number of students talked about their various avoidance strategies and the type of behaviours they would use in order to get sent out of class. Participants described a variety of behaviours acting out in class, conflicts with teachers and other students, skipping, truancy, and dropping-out as ways in which students dealt with personal feelings of competency and worth.

A discussion about these behaviours in classes and in school could provide the opportunity for an number of analyses. For some educators, these incidences could be used to point to the difficulty in sorting out the connections between behaviour and learning

disabilities. At the same time, these behaviours are indicators of the social and cultural nature of education and provide an opportunity to see behaviour as a coping mechanism when self-worth is challenged or threatened. Still further, behaviours become comments and criticisms of the relevancy and purpose of specific courses of study, pedagogical methods and the culture of schooling. Describing these various behaviours as acts of resistance is problematic.

Giroux (1983 & 1985) argued for the development and use of a theory of resistance which can be incorporated into a pedagogy which enlivens democratic schooling and produces a libratory dimension to education. The difficulty with Giroux's theory of resistance is that it sets fairly prescribed parameters for discussing student behaviours as acts of resistance. Without a political significance, understood primarily as critique and action meant to produce change, students' actions get limited to a category of purely oppositional behaviours which are essentially devoid of radical significance and are often manifestations of domination rather than genuine resistance. If critique and concrete actions against the systemic structuring,

controlling, and classifying actions of schools are the hallmarks of resistance, then the behaviours described by participants in this research would seem to fail to meet the criteria set by Giroux for acts of resistance.

Not all scholars or researchers would agree with the very limiting definitions and theoretical impositions Giroux would want to create. Fine (1986) and Nelson (1987) believed that there is a very clear message in behaviours such as truancy, skipping and dropping out, which are directed at the economic and social significance students attach to education. Even though participants in this study tended to corroborate research that suggests that they place a high priority on obtaining a high school education (Weis, 1990; Tanner, 1990), their actions and behaviours often implied something quite different.

Weis (1990) and Tanner (1990) suggested that a discussion about resistance is irrelevant in the modern economic and social context and therefore not applicable to students in the current school setting. Weis (1990) would have us refocus the issue in terms of identify formation. This notion is problematic for me personally because it might lead to the conclusion that

students' behaviours have little if anything to do with social criticism and conflict with the education system. At the same time, so much of what participants talked about in reflecting on their school experiences had to do with feelings of fitting in, acceptance, and self-esteem that it does not seem reasonable to dismiss Weis' arguments completely.

The discussions about confrontations with teachers indicated what seemed to involve identity issues often described as attempts to avoid the embarrassment that resulted from an inability to handle course content. The behaviours they talked about were more often than not designed to get them sent to the office where the discomfort of the class situation could be avoided. For some, there was always the more direct approach which involved truancy or skipping classes. Identity issues could be seen as well in the references they made to the way they felt about the social context of school, preferring to be able to socialize with their own peer groupings. These discussions, however, also indicated an awareness of some degree of class consciousness, especially when advantages and disadvantages were mentioned. In addition to the

social and personal benefits to be gained from hanging out, truancy also appeared to be an attempt to avoid the structures, routines, and regimentation of school.

Even though participants voiced strong opinions about the value of education, they complained about their courses and often challenged the relevancy of what they did in classes. It sometimes appeared that beyond a certificate that stated that they had completed high school, participants found little meaning to their school lives. This certainly suggests that what is at issue is a criticism of the relevancy of schooling at some level as much as it is an issue of identity. Focusing the discussion of behaviours simply as acts of identify formation is far too restricting and fails to identify schools as social sites and fields where conflict is abound to occur.

Bourdieu and Wacquant(1992) encouraged an examination of psychological and social dimensions of personal development which permits a view of behaviours as issues of both identity and resistance. For Bourdieu, conflict is a natural part of the dynamics between habitus and field. By viewing habitus as a psychological and social construct of the lived

experiences of individuals, we can understand behaviours as acts of subversion or preservation, as class consciousness, and as issues of identity.

Fields are invested with symbolic and cultural capital. Habitus accommodates itself to that field by exchanging capital. At the same time, however, habitus may resist or even seek to subvert the capital of the field. It is therefore possible to see participants reacting against the cultural capital invested in a field like education in their complaints about teachers and students, especially those whom they considered to be advantaged. The criticism about courses and relevancy could also be seen as a comment on the symbolic and cultural capital that is valued in the field of education. The notion of habitus also allows us to see that an individual like Carla would have little difficulty accommodating herself to the expectations and demands of the education system. She is representative of the kind of cultural capital one is required to have in order to deal effectively with the course content or to interact with teachers and students who themselves possess the capital required to fit into the field.

There are obvious concerns and difficulties with this approach to social analysis. Within this construct, the resistance and conflict inherent in the responses students make to the structure of education can be seen to work against them. Hence, Bourdieu could say, "Resistance may be alienating and submission may be liberating" (1990, p. 155). Here Bourdieu supported Willis' (1977) argument that resistance, while it certainly can and does occur, ends up producing further marginalization. This suggests that individuals who want to succeed need to adapt to the demands of a field by exchanging one set of cultural capital for another. This apparent fatalism and determinism is a significant concern in dealing with issues of agency and in modifying or transforming the structure of education (Gorder, 1980; Lakomski, 1984; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985).

Giroux obviously wanted to suggest that resistance can be made into something less alienating by harnessing it to challenge and invigorate education. Such a position on resistance theory could have the opposite effect. Theorizations could simply foster another kind of classificatory system which can all too

easily detract from the comment and critique, informed or otherwise, which students make about the educational system. My reading of Foucault suggests that we would do well to shy away from establishing theories which lend themselves to this type of classification. Foucault's predilection toward poststructuralism and its abhorrence of totalizing theorization would have made him suspect of any attempt to identify sites of freedom which could be easily subsumed by technologies of power/knowledge.

The purpose of this research was to investigate the extent to which students were aware of the impact of culture and their resistance to it. The research was also an attempt to encourage students to speak to the issue of reform. Yet, participants often asserted that there was nothing wrong with the system when asked what they thought needed to be changed. I expected as much from someone like Carla, but was genuinely surprised that so many others would feel this way, especially when they talked about the irrelevancy they experienced in so many of their courses.

It is difficult to gauge the significance of the positions of the participants on this issue and I find

that I am left with more questions than answers. Is the lack of suggestions for change an indication of some confusion about what an education can really accomplish? Is there some other value placed in education which they have difficulty identifying? Is there an underlying tone of cynicism in the response to the question of change? For example, the group session in which we talked about whether education should prepare young people to reshape the future of society turned rowdy when Steve rolled up a sheet of paper and used it like a trumpet to shout "the future of mankind" (Field Notes, Dec. 19, 1994). Students often appeared less interested in ideals and focused squarely on practical issues of survival voicing concerns about home, family, and good jobs. There was no evident need to look to a future that offered anything different or an educational system that challenged the suppositions of the present economic or social order.

These questions forced me to reflect back on the theoretical positions which were concerned with challenging personal and systemic suppositions and affecting change. Hence the interest in Giroux's theory of resistance and radical pedagogy. Despite the

opposition to Bourdieu's social analysis, I feel that his reflexivity addresses aspects of Giroux's pedagogical concerns. Reflexivity invites us to challenge the suppositions and the premises of historically and artificially constructed boundaries and to contemplate alternate considerations. While the durability of habitus implies hesitancy and perhaps even an unwillingness to make dramatic changes, it does not mean that habitus is immutable. Instead of perceiving habitus as a deterministic construct, we need to understand it dynamically as the process by which individuals engage their social worlds as sense-making. Davies (1993) seemed to point us in much the same direction as Bourdieu by focusing on the potential for constructing and changing perceptions and sense-making. She suggested that we need to move beyond socialization theory and focus our attention on the process of "subjectification" (p. 13) by which individuals create their existences.

Bourdieu's reflexivity would never be adequate to address the issues of systemic change which are at the core of Giroux's radical pedagogy. The concern here is that reflexivity may not necessarily address the needs

of a radical agenda. Giroux's interests lie in radicalizing the education system by creating a pedagogy infused with a cultural politics which springs from the lived experiences of students. We need to bear in mind that we cannot presume to know or guarantee the outcome of a process of reflexivity, otherwise it becomes imposed reflection and a "regime of truth" (Gore, 1993, p. 50). Gore (1993) suggested that Giroux is so preoccupied with his pedagogical project that he fails to identify how it impacts on implementation. Another criticism of Giroux (Senese, 1991) suggested that the notion of transforming the system from within is premised on an idealism which is unrealistic in the first place. This criticism suggested that even raising the issue of education and schools being in the vanguard of change is misguided. "The master's tools will not dismantle the master's house" (Lorde as quoted by Lather, 1991b, p. 157).

What of Giroux's social vision and his demand for pedagogical practice which is premised on cultural politics? This approach certainly indicates a belief in the need to allow student voices to be heard and to make education responsive to the circumstances of

students' lives. It reflects a belief that student subcultures are radical commentaries on society and are acts of resistance. The work of researchers such as Hebdige (1979) are evident in this approach. What is not considered, or so it seems, is that even Hebdige says that subcultures are constantly transformed by society into order to be made fit for public consumption.

This notion of a pedagogy based on cultural politics also seems to disregard a feminist analysis (McRobbie, 1980) which suggested that subcultures are often male dominated. In addition, a feminist analysis (McRobbie, 1991) suggested that females structure their resistance differently than males. This suggests that perhaps the greatest problem in premising pedagogies on cultural politics is that, for females at least, they are essentially consumers and not producers of culture. If we consider that subcultural expressions are made palatable by societal factors, then we might conclude that subcultural expressions of resistance are all too quickly robbed of their radicalness by becoming commodities for consumption.

Input by participants in this research did not

seem to present a critique which suggested that reform needs to entail aspects of cultural politics. Participants did not appear to be arguing for pedagogies which were more responsive to their own cultural expressions and identity. When they did respond to questions about the relevancy of their various courses, most criticism was directed toward practical aspects in terms of how a particular subject would benefit them in their daily living. They never made any references to having courses which would allow them to critique society. Their interests were in finding jobs, having homes, and families. Their suggestions about the options they would like to have in courses of studies sometimes left me feeling that they would end up making choices which would perpetuate their own cultural and class biases (Willis, 1977).

Part of me identifies with the desired outcomes of and purposes of cultural politics but my experiences in education and the responses of those who participated in this research suggest that students are more inclined to conformity. This is not to suggest that there are not indicators of change or potential for change. Bourdieu (1990) credited any crisis of

orthodoxy in which the dominance of the field becomes questionable or untenable as the vehicle through which change can occur. Social movements which challenge dominant discourses and structures are one possible area where we might look for aspects of change. The impact of the feminist critique was one such area that showed up in the course of research.

Tanya related the story about a confrontation with a male teacher over what she considered to be gender bias (Interview, Nov. 24, 1994). One of the discussion groups (Field Notes, Dec. 19, 1994) in which gender concerns were broached showed signs that females were keenly aware of issues which affected them. It showed as well that males were aware of the impact that the feminist movement has had in changing experiences and expectations for females. The males, however, seemed to indicate a less than favourable response to these changes. Some males indicated that they still held fairly stereotypical and gendered attitudes about the types of family life and relationships they would want to have.

The impact of social movements on student attitudes and perceptions can be seen as well in those

participants who spoke from a minority experience of race or culture. Anne, who had been involved in the local native community, was quick to address issues of hegemony and to criticize the school system for failing to recognize native culture. Cody and Harold were somewhat more conciliatory but seemed to be able to indicate how these expressions of protest and identity have impacted on school and personal experiences.

Bourdieu's crisis of orthodoxy also suggested that we need to become more aware of the extent to which the education system will be increasingly incapable of delivering on what it promises. The proliferation of credentialed individuals into an economy which cannot possibly provide the anticipated employment opportunities is bound to create tensions for the education system and the whole of society. As previously mentioned at the outset of this chapter, participants tended to face this reality with blind optimism about the future and their own perseverance. At the same time, however, a lot of what they had to say about their lives in school and the prospects for their futures betrayed a sense of fear and uncertainty. Complaints about courses, relevancy, conflicts with

teachers, truancy, and skipping are open to a number of interpretations. They are at one and the same time inherent criticisms of the system and indicators of identity and struggles for sense-making. Part of this criticism and this process of identity indicates what I feel is a genuine fearfulness and concern about the amount of control they have in being able to shape their own futures and to be able to create something for themselves that is different from what they already have.

Recent research (Tanner, 1990; Weis, 1990) suggested that working class culture is going through a process of redefinition as the economy shifts away from heavy industry. Tanner (1990) suggested that not only are we witnessing changes which make manual-mental distinctions based on gender expectations and class culture (Willis, 1977) irrelevant but that youth today have come to place some amount of credibility in the potential for upward mobility. A number of participants in this research who came from lower or working class backgrounds expressed a belief that they would be able to find employment in what would normally be considered middle class careers or even be able to

operate their own business.

At the same time, however, I was struck by what I considered to be contradictions in the information I was given. Cody, for example, talked about going to college or university or being a lawyer or a social worker but could say that he might end up looking for work as an ironworker like his father. Gerry knew as well that he might dream about going to college but his educational background would probably mean that he was limited in career options to something in a trade. John could talk about early childhood education and working with children but he could always fall back on landscaping if those plans failed. Allowing participants to reflect on future goals and ambitions was one way I hoped to gauge the extent to which class and cultural background informed decisions about school. Even though participants talked in terms which might be seen to indicate a shift in evaluating the meaning of work, working class males all too quickly fell back on the expectation of manual jobs.
Family life is yet another area which can be seen to offer some insight into class and cultural influences. Willis' (1977) "lads" indicated a distinct inclination

toward a gender bias in relationships and family life. This research can be critiqued on the basis that it is dated and is contextualized to the British cultural scene. More glaring, however, is the fact that this research is a study of a male population and fails to offer either a female perspective or a feminist critique. Weis (1990) suggested that males are becoming more family focused while females place a higher importance on career. Carla was the only female who suggested any ambivalence about family life and who acknowledged that education and a career were more important. The other females participating in this research did not provide information which clarified whether they held one as more important than the other. Based on the information I did receive, it would appear that most of the participants in this research from working class backgrounds showed no differentiation along gender lines in terms of a value placed on family life (Tanner, 1990). The males were more specific than the females in describing their expectations for family life. They tended toward fairly stereotypical gender distinctions in terms of roles within the family. Whether the lack of specifics or the brief

acknowledgment of the intent to be in relationships and have children was an indication of some ambivalence on the part of females is not possible to determine. The experiences of Carole and Christine raised questions for them about the maturity of the males they encountered. Both teen mothers suggested that relationships for some males was simply a way to gain access to their mothers' allowances.

The preceding discussion indicates some areas in which this research points to differentiations based on gender primarily as a product of social movements. Discussions about substance abuse and violence provided another opportunity to glimpse aspects of social and personal space in which males and females structured their lives differently. Most of the males who participated in this research provided stories which described their use of various substances both during school hours and in other social settings. John was the one participant who seemed to point to drug use as a form of rebellion and resistance. Descriptions about substance abuse were conspicuously absent from the stories told by females except to point out the extent to which they perceived it a problem in some schools.

Both males and females provided similar examples of truancy and skipping, examples of avoidance strategies, and indicated similar patterns in terms of behaviours. Males, however, were more inclined to provide stories which indicated situations involving acting out and deliberate attempts to either instigate or escalate problems. Males as well provided more examples of situations in which conflicts with teachers arose in which they were removed from class or school. John and Gerry both recounted situations where they had resorted to violence in confrontations with teachers. Females seemed much more inclined toward passivity and non-confrontation. Females were more apt to talk about disagreements and confrontations in terms of verbal aggression. Anne, however, pointed out that she felt the need to establish a reputation for being tough in order to make social life in her high school easier.

Despite the examples where violent language or actions had been used, all students expressed an abhorrence of violence in schools and felt that the media presentations about such situations were specific to other communities, not their own. They all tended to view violence as isolated situations and expressed a

belief that they felt quite safe in their present school environments. A number of participants, however, identified violence as a social reality they face and often one which is a lived experience in their home and family lives. Research in this area needs to go further in determining differences between the genders or even whether female culture is itself becoming increasingly more violent.

My purposes for this research were threefold: to determine perceptions of cultural diversity and expression in terms of issues of hegemony and marginalization, to attempt to clarify issues of resistance, and to allow students to speak about their own needs and expectations for education. The preceding discussion delved into those aspects by way of positioning participants' attitudes and responses along side theoretical approaches. The lack of articulated positions on these specific issues often made study and analysis difficult. This became especially evident in the absence of concrete and specific criticisms of the educational system and recommendations for areas in which changes need to be made. Far too often, I fear, I thought that responses

from the participants should corroborate or confirm other research and I was plagued by the personal need to be able to generalize the information they provided. This does not mean, however, that I am left without some confirmations and new suspicions about the course of education.

My own undeclared agenda in this research process has been to be able to familiarize myself with a broader range of research material and theoretical positions. I certainly feel that has been accomplished to some extent. Performance and ritual studies suggest an alternate approach for addressing issues of culture and resistance in future research. McLaren (1986) has already broken some ground in this direction.

This present research has suggested that a focus on establishing a notion of resistance which can be fitted into theoretical frameworks proves frustrating, especially if we insist that behaviours need to convey radical importance. I am much more in favour of an open-ended approach which perceives oppositional behaviour as psychological and social responses, akin to Bourdieu's habitus.

Participants were unable to articulate how their

oppositional behaviours were comments or criticisms of the educational system. However, their descriptions of socio-economic backgrounds and family life suggest the extent to which so many students are disadvantaged when it comes to coping with the system. How these marginalized students can cope is a constant frustration and concern for me personally. This research and the experiences of the participants have reinforced for me the need to be cognizant of the social and cultural aspects of schooling. Schools are not static and neutral sites but rather the locus of dynamic social interactions which often betray the most profound difficulties in society. Thus, educators know only too well that the experiences an individual student brings to the school site can limit the best intentions of programs and actions by the staff. A social/cultural analysis suggests that some of the criticism of schools is misplaced and misdirected.

## Conclusions

I want to begin these concluding remarks by examining what I consider purely systemic issues and concerns. My own critical position leaves me suspicious about the most recent recommendations for

change in this province (Report of the Royal Commission on Learning, 1994; The Common Curriculum, 1995). At the same time I am encouraged by the attempts to bring about pedagogical styles marked by integrated approaches and collaboration. Such approaches have the potential to challenge the epistemologies which have informed educational practice. I am especially encouraged by the report of the Royal Commission on Learning (1994), particularly in the extent to which it acknowledges the hegemony of curriculum and the hidden dynamics of the school system. There is also a measure of hope in the voice that the report gives to the disparity experienced by some populations within the system, acknowledging that students are bound to experience frustration and anxiety when they realize that they are engaged in courses of study which offer essentially dead-end diplomas.

One of the significant aspects of both of these documents is the recommendation to shift to outcomes-based education. Now, instead of the present streaming, we could have an alternate set of labels and categories with an equally "mechanistic mindset that would parse the experience of students into boxes

labelled outputs and levels" (Barlow & Robertson, 1994, p. 231). Furthermore, determining whether an individual student has attained the desired or expected level requires some method of evaluation. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that these documents suggest an increase use of testing which Barlow and Robertson (1994) suggested has less to do with an educational agenda and more to do with a political concession to the critics of the education system. Despite the pronouncements about the inequity and injustice within the present system, this part of the Royal Commission's recommendations ensures that middle and upper-class students will continue to be advantaged and accrue the most benefits from the system. The Report of the Royal Commission can only recommend that the Ministry of Education and Training reassess the entrance requirements for students seeking entry into the province's colleges and universities which, given the present funding cutbacks and curtailments, may well limit access to those who have both the academic credentials and the financial resources to experience post-secondary education.

Throughout the process of this research I

experienced doubts about what final analyses and suggestions might be made. Such doubts and concerns arose, in part, over the impositional nature of research itself and a deeply rooted suspicion that most change within systems remains essentially hegemonic. One of the contributions that poststructuralism has made to research endeavours is that it "foregrounds both the limits of consciousness and intentionality and the will to power inscribed in sense-making efforts which aspire to universal, totalizing explanatory frameworks" (Lather, 1991b, p. 155). Rather than focusing on what can be known about students, this research has been more instrumental in forcing me as a teacher to ask what I need to know about myself and the system in which I work.

My interest with the issues addressed throughout this research lies in understanding the process to which individuals are subjected and the ways in which they make sense of it all. This is what I perceive as the primary intent of Bourdieu's notion of habitus, a construct that resists categorization and in the final analysis insists on a celebrative mode. The lack of articulated responses to issues of critique or change

cannot be taken to imply that participants had nothing to say about what was wrong with the education system. Gaskell (1992) reminded us that we do a gross disservice to students if we presume somehow that they are "cultural dopes" (p. 51) who mindlessly and blindly accept conditions which counter their own experiences. Ways of knowing are not always articulated (Davies, 1993).

In the final analysis, there is a sense of amazement and surprise that students are able to construct their own sense within the education system and use it to some creative advantage. As a teacher I am required to perform the mandatory duty to catch students who are wandering the halls and report them to the office. I occasionally feel a twinge of guilt that I must carry out this responsibility, especially when I consider that what they might be doing in the halls is as important, or in some cases, more important than what they might be required to do in the class.

So many participants in this research continued to talk about not wanting to become a "bum." I understand this thought a number ways: expectations they have for themselves, expectations for what they

hope to gain from an education, and a genuine anxiety about what lies ahead for them. Beneath the veneer of optimism might be found a deep-seated uncertainty and fear for the future. While research such as this may not provide grounds for generalizations, it serves to conscientize us to the conditions and situations which students experience and to features which can be seen from one situation to another.

This research also emphasized for me the importance of the social dynamics of schooling. That is visible whether we talk about the experiences which individuals bring to education sites which immediately advantage them or disadvantage them, whether we talk about their social contacts in the halls, both the positive and negative experiences, or what happens in classroom settings. This final point is important for me as a teacher to bear in mind. While many participants complained about their teachers, they could be equally magnanimous in crediting the interest shown by a particular teacher for the success they experienced in school. It seems to me that what they were saying was that the social dynamics marked by respect and concern were especially important to them.

I am often left floundering around between the desire to see education as a tool to effect social change and a gut-wrenching feeling that this is nothing more than fanciful thinking. This research process has reinforced the need to re-evaluate and relocate the locus of action. If the participants in this research have a say in that, it needs to be found in the dynamics between individuals. Lather, it seems to me would argue much the same point. "Research and pedagogy are sites where we can address change at the micro-level of local resistance verses the macro-level of dominating forces" (Lather, 1991b, p. 154).

Focusing on micro aspects forces us to recognize that the most immediate contact students have with education is in the classroom and the relational dynamics that exist there. Teachers, therefore, can respect students' acts of resistance as indicators of their class, cultural and social identities and as opportunities to reflect collectively on aspects of education and pedagogy. Simply suggesting sensitivity to the frustration and fear students experience as they deal with their school lives and an uncertain future is not enough. As a teacher, I need to recognize and

examine situations which legitimate control and power and be engaged by students and peers to experiment, apply and continually reexamine (Reynolds, 1994).

I feel that Bourdieu's attempt to create a scientific method for sociology (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) possesses some possible suggestions for us to pursue as we consider the intrapersonal and social implications within contexts like education or the school. Teachers can abandon the notion of professionalism which reflects a specific construct of field and embrace a new sense of communitarianism and cooperation. This allows us to collaborate with students and the community in new and innovative educational projects. Those aspects of the Report of the Royal Commission on Learning (1994) that deal with community based education and school-community councils are worth encouraging.

Since the social world is divided into fields which often possess their own ways of knowing, pluralistic and relational approaches help to avoid social differentiations or opposing populations and generate a spirit of tolerance. Pedagogies which promote integrated studies or holistic education

disrupt dominant and hegemonic epistemologies. Educators can adopt and teach from a hermeneutic of suspicion which challenges the labels, concepts and terms we use to objectify others.

Each of us possesses our own habitus constructed from social origins, academic background, gender, and lived experiences. We can adopt an attitude in which our gaze on the world may be challenged and transformed. Habitus does not allow for a claim to impartiality. A reflexivity which encourages and permits evaluation by students and peers allows us to objectify our own position within a field, in effect deconstructing our own stories in order to reconstruct another.

Teachers can be more vocal in challenging the current finger pointing and attempts to fix blame on the educational system for the problems which rightfully belong to inadequacies within the economic and social conditions of our society. We can be more intentional about reframing the debate in the society at large in terms of what we want an education to accomplish and what the markets claim to be able to offer.

I have some genuine concerns about what downsizing and restructuring will mean for Canadian society and specifically for Canadian education. My deepest suspicion is that from an economic and financial perspective, it is nothing more than a quick profit grab. It also seems to indicate an attempt to control labour, especially when we consider the fluidity of capital that can run to cheaper markets. Talk of restructuring can seem to betray an American understanding of democracy, one which points toward an attempt to infuse a sense of personal accountability and responsibility which ultimately benefits the advantaged.

Barlow and Robertson (1994) painted a very poignant picture of what these changes have meant and might entail for the future of education in this country. "The educational philosopher John Dewey saw the role of choice in education as the exercise of our collective responsibility to choose from among competing possibilities what is best for all children. No doubt Dewey would be appalled to see choice appropriated by the conservative alliance to uncouple the fortunes of some children from the fortunes of

others, claiming that everyone will be better off" (Barlow & Robertson, 1994, p. 188). Democratic schooling is about both "individuality and connectedness" (Novak, 1994, p. 4).

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## APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. Tell me briefly about your schooling. Schools attended? Grades completed?
2. Tell me what a day during the school year looks like for you.
3. What do you think is most important about school?
4. Do you feel that what you learn at school is relevant or necessary?
5. Tell me about times when there were problems at school. How did your family respond?
6. What expectations do you have for school? What expectations does your family have for your education?
7. Do you see school figuring into your future at all? When? How?
8. How has your opinion about school changed over the years?