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ISBN 0-315-56424-5

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF SCHOOL RELEVANCE

AS PERCEIVED BY

GRADE SEVEN AND EIGHT STUDENTS

by

Roseanne McNeill

Thesis presented to the School of Graduate Studies  
of the University of Ottawa  
in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for degree of  
Master of Arts (Education)

Ottawa, Ontario, 1989



UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA  
UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA

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### Acknowledgments

For their endless support, patience and understanding, the writer wishes to express deep gratitude to her husband, George, without whose kindness the project would not have been accomplished, and her two children, Robbie, the computer expert, and Grant.

With great respect, the writer acknowledges the worthy assistance of Professor Jean-Paul Dionne, who devoted many hours of direction and who respected and valued the work of the writer.

Sincere thanks are extended to the many friends, relatives, fellow teachers and neighbours who never seemed to tire of listening to complaints or lending a hand.

To the numerous students who contributed such wonderful opinions about their schooling, the writer expresses her gratitude and only hopes that educators of the future will listen more to the students who know a great deal about how they learn. To the parents who allowed their children to be interviewed, thank you.

Sincere thanks are extended to Mr. Keith Hanton and Mr. Mike Knox for allowing the research to be conducted in their schools, Meadowlands Middle School and Sir Winston Churchill School, and to Mr. Ken Mitchell for acting as a liaison. Also, thanks to the Research and Development department of the Carleton Board of Education for their kind permission and trust.

## Abstract

Eager to learn when they begin their school career, many students gradually lose interest, become bored and "turn off" school. Focusing upon the schooling process from the students' perspective, the study is an exploration of what students perceive to be relevant. By conducting semi-structured interviews with pairs of students, the researcher probed for an explanation of their perceptions. The mental model of Holland, Holyoak, Nisbett and Thagard (1986) provided the means to operationalize the study. For grade seven and eight students, school relevance appears to have two dimensions. Practical relevance concerns tests and marks, preparation for high school, college or university, a career and one's future life. Personal relevance relates to the intrinsic value of learning, the sense of satisfaction or feelings of fun, enjoyment or interest. Based upon a Vygotskian theoretical framework which stresses that learning is primarily a social phenomenon, the research revealed the importance of fellow classmates, friends and teachers, as well as an appropriately challenging learning environment incorporating interactive involvement and discovery. Since most ideas were student-generated, typical grade seven and eight terminology emerged. Issues pertinent to students and expressed in their own terminology could be used, rather than foreign, adult-generated language, in creating future instruments, such as surveys or questionnaires. In-depth interviews and their subsequent analysis were a rich source of information regarding students' perceptions of the relevance of their schooling.

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## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Young children are characteristically curious, keen to learn and energetic in the pursuit of discovering their environment. They never seem to tire of asking questions, observing their surroundings, figuring out how things operate or where things come from. This thirst for understanding is most evident in preschool children. Usually, children look forward to taking the big step of starting school. Gradually, however, as students proceed through the grades, there is a trend for many to lose interest in learning, and to become bored, apathetic or "turned-off". Many "drop-out" when they become old enough; many others endure the boredom in order to graduate, or become serious discipline problems. What causes such a dramatic shift in children's attitudes? Why can a child's inherent desire to learn not be maintained throughout his schooling years?

One can speculate that such a phenomenon occurs because students do not perceive the schooling process to be relevant. "Perceived relevance", then, will be defined in the present study as what the student feels is important or pertinent in his schooling experience. If the student can relate to or connect with the matter at hand, i.e. the lesson, person(s), experience or event, it will have some bearing or be relevant to him/her.

The topic of relevance is of particular interest to educators and researchers. Teachers are puzzled or frustrated by students' apparent lack of interest or effort in their schooling. Often, this apathy is put down to laziness or being spoiled by over-indulgent parents. Or it can be conveniently accounted for by "the generation gap"; kids lack the ambition or industry of their elders. Television is another common excuse for the problem. A teacher's initial reaction might be that it is a matter of motivating the students. Yet, this simply does not work for many students or teachers. Some individuals are so "turned-off" that all methods of motivation fail. It has to be something more than strictly motivation from an external force.

School, it is proposed in the present study, may not be adequately relevant to the needs and interests of many students. Many students do not perceive their schooling experience to be relevant. After all, even an adult has trouble being interested or even attending to something that bears no relevance.

Is it important for educators to be aware of what students perceive to be relevant in their schooling? If teachers cannot "relate" to students, provide meaningful, interesting and "relevant" instruction, it is little wonder that students become bored, "turned-off" and, either physically or mentally, remove themselves from a meaningless experience. As students grow older, they become more perceptive and critical, a fact most apparent when children become teenagers. Furthermore, they are less willing to accept what is set down by adults. On the other hand, they

become more adept at hiding their feelings and internalizing their frustrations. That is neither to say that students are less interested in learning nor that the schooling process is not pertinent; it is simply that the learning process is not perceived as pertinent by many students, either immediately or for their future. If educators were more aware of students' perceptions of their schooling, perhaps a more conscientious effort could be made to make it a more relevant experience. It would appear that the student's perspective, the most important link in the educational system, may be little considered when it comes to the establishment of school practices.

What do students regard as important in their schooling? The objective of the research is to discover what a group of grade seven and eight students have to say about this subject.

### Review of the Literature

From a review of the literature it appeared that there have been few studies conducted on the subject of school relevance. None were found which directly assessed the students' perceptions of school "relevance". Manual and computer searches revealed research that focussed upon some issues that impinge upon relevance, such as personal growth, achievement, innovation, and practicality. However, they only touched the subject obliquely and haphazardly. Various words were used in the key search, such as "student perception", "student attitudes", "teacher-student

relationship", "motivation", "student interests", and "student evaluation of teacher performance". Even accounting for different terminology, there appears to be little research on the specific subject of the relevance of school. In the literature, the term "relevance" is usually applied to training schools and technical courses as they directly prepare college students for the workplace. Only one study was found which used the term "relevance" per se or approached the topic from the researcher's point of view.

Realizing that the topic of school relevance covers a broad spectrum of issues, the researcher surveyed a wide range of literature on subjects that were related to this topic. The following description consists of a brief sampling of studies which illustrate a variety of methods that have been utilized to assess school environments from the student's perspective.

A student is constantly interacting with his environment. As early as 1929, techniques were being developed to observe and record school children's behaviour (Thomas, 1929). A pioneer in the study of person/environment interaction was Kurt Lewin, who proposed that behaviour is considered to be a function of the person and the environment (Lewin, 1935). Relationships among components of a perceptual field rather than the fixed characteristics of the separate components determined perception. Although his work did not focus on school settings, Lewin's field theory lent credence to a more humanistic frame of reference and embraced a network of interacting variables; this led to research

on human behaviour in more natural settings, quite a distinct swing away from "objective" psychology, such as behaviorism.

Over the past three decades, there have evolved several methods of studying school environments:

1. naturalistic and case study techniques
2. direct observation techniques
3. quantitative techniques, i.e. scales, surveys, inventories, questionnaires, polls
4. participant observation techniques

Naturalistic techniques, where the researcher is normally a part of the particular environment, follow a more qualitative approach. They are clearly illustrated in well-known books such as To Sir With Love (Braithwaite, 1950) and Up the Down Staircase (Kaufman, 1964), both books written from the teacher's perspective. Case Studies are a more direct approach to studying classroom environments (Stake and Easley, 1978, in Fraser, 1986). They are usually conducted over a period of time by an outside researcher who studies a particular situation or person. Philip Cusick (1973) who spent six months as a participant observer in an American high school attempted to view school life through the eyes of the students. Becoming a member of a group of senior students, he experienced school life as closely as possible to that of an actual student.

The method of direct observation involves an external observer who attempts to systematically code and record events in

the classroom setting (Rosenshine and Furst, 1973; Dunkin and Biddle, 1974, in Fraser). Observational data is based upon a limited number of exposures and is subject to the interpretations of the observer.

Quantitative techniques which utilize instruments such as scales and inventories are another approach to assessing classroom environments. Such methods have been used to evaluate students' perceptions of their schooling. Considering that students spend thousands of hours in a classroom, it is expected that they would hold some fairly significant perceptions about their experiences. R.H. Moos developed the Classroom Environment Scale (CES) which assessed three dimensions: personal growth, system maintenance and change, and relationships. Students were asked to rate both the actual and what they would consider to be the "ideal" situation. There were large discrepancies between the two; students expressed a wish for more involvement, affiliation, teacher support, order, organization and innovation. Prior to selecting the dimensions for the CES, Moos interviewed students and teachers; however, he did not elaborate upon the process. Moos draws many interesting conclusions from his findings regarding classroom environments and learning (Moos, 1979).

Viewing the interplay of social skills with motivation to achieve, Herbert Walberg developed The Barclay Classroom Climate Inventory which included self-report items, peer nominations and teacher judgments. Walberg argued that most researchers using evaluation instruments are more preoccupied with the instrument

development than linking cognitive and affective outcomes to characteristics of the learning environment. Various questionnaires were used for both elementary and high school level. For example, the Elementary School Environment Survey measured students' perceptions of the educational environment and involved: practicality, community, awareness, propriety and scholarship. (Walberg, 1974)

Fraser (1986) investigated both students' and teachers' perceptions of psychosocial aspects of the classroom environment. Like Moos, Fraser assessed teachers' and students' perceptions of both the actual and "preferred" classroom environment. Fraser presents a detailed comparison of five scales, adapted in part from the work of Walberg (1982) and Moos (1974), which were administered to thousands of students in Australia, ranging from primary school to college and university. He also reviewed dozens of other classroom and school environment instruments and made tentative comments regarding the relationship between the nature of classroom environments and students' achievement of cognitive and attitudinal goals. Rather than directing his work at researchers, Fraser encouraged teachers to use classroom environment assessments and urged that such measures be used in school effectiveness studies. Traditionally, educators have been primarily concerned with student achievement, largely ignoring the impact of the environment of classrooms and schools (Fraser, 1986, p.189)

Another example of the use of scales may be seen in Jackson (1968). His use of the Student Opinion Poll provides the basis for his views on student attitudes. However, the discussion invariably reverts to the teachers' perspective. The use of such instruments is helpful in the evaluation process but the depth and breadth of perceptions are constrained by the dimensions of the scale. Responses are more quickly given impressions than thoughtful feedback.

Combining the survey technique with an ethnographic investigation, Isherwood, Ahola, Hammah and Sullivan (1979) conducted a comparative study of two Quebec high schools, one large and one small. They used an adaptation of the Quality of School Life (QSL), (Epstein and McPartland, 1979). This scale was formulated from responses of high school students, regarding such items as: attitudes toward teachers, commitment to school work and satisfaction with school. Although it was felt that the combination of the techniques used was complementary, the survey did not tap the "hidden curriculum of the school or the expressive level of school socialization" (Isherwood, Ahola, Hammah and Sullivan, p. 62).

Much research has focussed upon teacher behaviour and its effect upon educational outcomes. For example, teacher-pupil interaction has been studied at length. Taking almost twenty years to develop his sophisticated coding system, Ned A. Flanders evaluated the balance between initiative and response of teachers and students. That is, who initiates dialogue most frequently in

the classroom? The Flanders Interaction Analysis Categories (FIAC), (Flanders, 1970), provided seven categories of the teacher's talk (Flander's terminology) and only two for pupils; thus the focus was more upon how the teacher influences interaction. Flander's well-known approach attempts to take into account both the cognitive and affective component of teacher rapport with students.

The thesis, "An Educationally Relevant Concept of Relevance" (James, 1980), is a comparative study of the strengths and weaknesses of the traditional subject-centred approach to learning which is found in most intermediate and high schools in Canada and the child-centred approach, with its roots in John Dewey's concept of Progressive Education. Accepting the definition of the purpose of education as transmitting culture, socializing the young, and developing each student's ability to maximum capacity (Saylor, 1973, in James), James proceeds to examine how effectively the two methods address the needs and interests of the students. Education, she maintains, will be relevant if it addresses these needs. However, she points out that relevance is not an absolute property. The concept of relevance infers a relation to something. This is constantly changing and depends upon many factors. "Curricula are organized with stifling departmentalization" (Gnagey, 1972, p. 315, in James). Gnagey maintains that education, from birth, must be interesting and relevant enough to prevent dropouts. Also, the idea that education is life-long, not terminal, must be instilled in the child. Nevertheless, he maintains that formal schooling must assure the mastery of the

fundamentals (the three R's). James concludes that the best method of assuring relevance in the schooling process is to integrate the two approaches, subject-centred and child-centred, and describes those aspects of each which contribute to a more relevant experience. Unfortunately, it is felt that James concluded the thesis prematurely; the integration of the two approaches is rather superficial and brief. Emphasis is more upon a full description of the subject-centred and child-centred approaches rather than an in-depth proposal for creating a more relevant educational experience. Nonetheless, the thesis provides an interesting approach to the study of relevance. Of particular value are the various conceptions of relevance by several authors. Also, it was somewhat reassuring to find at least one study on the subject of relevance!

An example of another interesting technique of assessing students' views on classroom environments is seen in How to Live Through Junior High School (Johnson, 1975), an informal, practical discussion based upon responses to a questionnaire by grade five to nine pupils, their parents and teachers. Many of the questions called for yes/no/maybe answers, although a number were open to free responses. The author, an experienced teacher and counsellor, balanced their replies with his own experiences to write a guidebook for students, teachers and parents on the many questions about life as an adolescent student. While not very scientific, the book is extremely realistic and enlightening. Many comments are quoted directly and provide an authentic view from three different perspectives.

In "How was school today, dear?" "Fine, what's for dinner?", Friedman (1977) writes a guide for parents in dealing with their children in the school system. Like Johnson, the approach is informal, humorous and based upon personal experiences with students. Nonetheless, such books give interesting insights from different perspectives.

The issue of relevance is currently under the scrutiny of educational administrators in Ontario. The Ontario Study of the Relevance of Education and the Issue of Dropouts (Ministry of Education, February 15, 1988), better known as "The Radwanski Report", contains recommendations aimed at lowering the drop-out rate. The elimination of streaming and restricted course choices, for example, would substantially alter the classroom environment and subsequently the students' perceptions of their schooling.

The Ontario Ministry of Education is concerned that schools are catering to the minority who are heading to university. They propose that providing more relevant programs will hopefully encourage students to stay in school longer.

The Carleton Board of Education recently completed a survey of more than 60,000 students, parents, ratepayers and teachers. The Attitudinal Survey (1986), revealed a positive general impression of schools in Carleton County, Ontario. Two of the areas requiring improvement, however, were how to stimulate and challenge the students more and how to prepare students better for the world of work and post-secondary education.

The above review of the literature exemplifies the different methods which have been used to assess students' attitudes and perceptions of their school environment. It is by no means an exhaustive description, more a brief sampling of the most noted methods that have been tried over the past two decades. Participant observation techniques, ethnographic field studies, naturalistic techniques or milieu inhabitant reports, and the use of scales, inventories and questionnaires have been widely used. Each method renders a different type of information or offers a different perspective; combinations of methods provide even more variety.

While it is evident that there are strengths and weaknesses to each method, a researcher must decide which method will be most effective in revealing what he/she is looking for. Ethnographic studies are open-ended, with minimal a priori constraints. They provide in-depth descriptions of a unique situation, which are not usually generalizable, and are subject to the interpretations of the researcher.

Direct observation methods are limited to the focus taken by the observer. Also, the amount of time devoted to the observations and the recording, interpretation and reporting of results are dependant upon the observer's discretion. This might result in a high degree of subjectivity.

On the other hand, the use of scales, questionnaires and other similar evaluative tools, while directly addressing specific issues which the researcher chooses to investigate, constrains the

subject to respond only to those elements set down and in the way prescribed by the researcher. No doubt they are efficacious, fast, standardized, controlled and accurate but they tap only surface information. Quick reaction responses to a small range of choices or inappropriate choices may not accurately reflect the perspective of the students and certainly do not provide such in-depth or in-breadth results as those acquired through participant observation techniques. An added problem is created by the use of adult terminology which may be foreign to the students. Students may end up guessing or ignoring the question. A suggestion to overcome this problem will be discussed later in the study. The value of these instruments seems to lie chiefly in their ease of administration to a large number of subjects, and analysis with a fair degree of standardization.

Through participant observation techniques, a group of students is observed in their natural environment over a period of time by a person who attempts to become immersed in the students' world as fully as possible. Frequently, in conjunction with this method and to enhance the findings, students are interviewed or asked to complete rating scales or questionnaires. In the studies examined, it was unclear how the interview protocols were utilized; there did not appear to be any direct, objective and systematic analyses of the students' responses incorporated in the research findings. Although participant observation techniques are a genuine attempt to view the individual in his environment, a factor which is of prime importance when one's objective is to study the individual as he interacts with his environment, this

method is unavoidably subject to the observer's interpretations. Furthermore, participant observers are still ostensibly outsiders and cannot help but bring their own perspective to the situation. Consequently, there is a risk that the perspective of the students is not genuinely reflected.

In the studies, much can be gleaned from the various experiences, methods and findings of researchers of student perception evaluation. A great deal has been written about the subject of children in school, from various perspectives, including that of teacher, parent and researcher. Each perspective, however, while offering a different slant, is bound to colour the findings. How can the perspective of the students be understood in any depth, then, without being restricted by the shortcomings of the above methodologies? The objective of the present study was to devise a methodology which would reveal the student's perceptions of school as closely and directly as possible and reveal patterns amongst a number of students' responses. The question became obvious: what is important to the students in their schooling and how closely does the school come in meeting these needs? The best way to find out, it seemed, was to ask the students. Such a direct, exploratory approach to this particular subject does not seem to have been taken by past researchers; a review of the literature revealed no such studies.

## Theoretical Framework

The classroom is a complex learning environment, the setting for countless interactions between its members. Not only is the individual influenced by his environment, he also influences it; one meshes with the other, both in a state of constant interaction and adaptation. Each classroom has a unique character which is created by the interplay of all its various components. One has only to be an observer in a classroom, with an average of thirty pupils, for a short time, to realize that it is a dynamic place.

The study of such a broad topic requires a theoretical framework which can encompass a holistic approach to the learning process, one which emphasizes a global view while still retaining the depth and diversity of the dynamic processes involved.

Taking a broad, conceptual approach to learning, L.S. Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, examined the impact of formal schooling upon a child's cognitive development. Not satisfied with simply describing the learning environment, he sought to give a comprehensive explanation of this complex phenomenon. Vygotsky believed that such an explanation requires a socio-historico-cultural approach, one which would incorporate the myriad, everyday learning situations.

Learning is a social phenomenon, he maintained, whereby imitation is a vital activity for development. The teacher and significant others are of primary importance. Also, language and dialogue become vital tools to enable the child to interact with

his/her social environment. External symbols gradually become internalized which, in turn, mediate future thought. Therefore, the school environment, particularly the social milieu, is of prime importance. "Human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.88). A person's complex mental processes are considered to be formed and guided by interaction with his/her social environment.

What differentiates humans from animals is man's historical and cultural roots. Tool and sign systems, including language, are developed by societies over time and, in turn, help to shape the future behaviour of both the society and the individual. Environments are constantly shifting, historically and culturally; these contexts shape the child's development. The tools of his particular culture and the language used by those who relate to him require him to adapt, restructure, interact, integrate and internalize. As children travel more widely, meet new people, have easy and frequent access to multi-media, their own environment is affected and changed. The classroom is a microcosm of this environment, with students of divergent backgrounds, interests, behaviours and attitudes. Each student contributes to the social environment as well as is influenced by it. A student must attend school, by law, until he is sixteen. A minimum of eleven years of seven hours per day is a significant segment of a child's life.

Vygotsky viewed learning and development as dynamic processes. These two processes do not develop simultaneously. In

fact, learning precedes development. This sequence results in what Vygotsky termed "the zone of proximal development". He defines this as:

the distance between the (child's) actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (Vygotsky, 1978, p.86)

Therefore, he reasoned, learning must aim at the child's potential level; "the only 'good' learning is that which is in advance of development" (Vygotsky, p.89). Learning activates developmental processes. Meaningful learning, or learning which is relevant to the child, must pose a reasonable challenge and captivate his interest. If the work is suitably challenging and interesting, it is proposed in the present study, then the student will perceive the work to be relevant.

Vygotsky perceived the individual as an active participant in his development, one who shapes and is shaped by his environment. A keen observer of children in their natural settings, he watched them as they played, as they were taught, and as they learned. His goal was "to discover the means and methods that subjects use to organize their own behaviour" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.74). He viewed the individual as he reacted to his environment at all stages of the process.

Vygotsky's insightful theories of the learning process, therefore, provide a valuable framework upon which to base the study of students' perceptions of their schooling environment. Vygotsky believed that only through discovering the dynamics of a person's higher psychological functions could one come to understand the learning process. From a Vygotskian point of view, analysis should subordinate description to explanation. The explanation, in his view, is what reveals the actual, causal, dynamic relationship. His experiments focussed on process analysis as opposed to object analysis. This requires "a dynamic display of the main points making up the process's history" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.61). The present study is an attempt both to identify "what" are students' perceptions and to probe for "why" they hold these views.

#### Articulation of the Problem

Past research, as reviewed in the preceding pages, has attempted to describe how students feel about their schooling. Through the use of various methodologies, students' views have been studied at length. But researchers have not addressed the subject of what students perceive to be relevant in the schooling process or how students arrive at their perceptions about school. As Vygotsky might say, past researchers have attempted to describe the classroom environment but have not given an explanation of the dynamics underlying the situation. What leads one to perceive his/her environment in a certain way? Uncovering these perceptions

and their interrelations will lead to a better understanding of what students perceive to be relevant and whether their schooling is, indeed, relevant.

How can a student evaluate the relevance of his schooling? What is his point of reference? To what can he compare the actual situation? A functional framework which allows the researcher to gain such an explanation of the students' thought processes was found in Holland, Holyoak, Nisbett, and Thagard (1986). A child can form a "mental model" of a current situation and project what that same situation could be, potentially. A person constructs representations of some portion of his social or physical world, the environment, in order to achieve his goals. Such representations are called mental models. They are dynamic and transient, "the major source of inductive change in long-term knowledge structures" (Holland et al., 1986, p.14). Models are based upon rules, which are termed "condition-action rules"; if a given situation arises, then a specific action will follow. Rules are in a constant state of revision, new ones are generated and old ones discarded. They compete with and support each other simultaneously, being evaluated in terms of their utility for overcoming obstacles to the achievement of current or future goals.

A concept different from but similar to "schema", the mental model is flexible and dynamic in that it is not limited by what is already in the memory, is not required to find the perfect match

with a presently held category representation and is thus able to adapt to novel situations.

The model describes aspects of the environment and of the individual's actions that are relevant to the attainment of his/her goals; that which is irrelevant is ignored. Ill-defined problems can be incorporated by this model and they are not limited by concrete situations. Most important, mental models allow for the role of experience. This framework is particularly useful for research on students' perceived relevance because it allows an individual to interpret the variability of his world in a way that can be understood by the researcher. Through an inductive process, a student is able to construct mental models of both his current school situation and what he perceives the school should be, ideally. In order to externalize these highly abstract concepts, i.e. students' perceptions of their schooling, the researcher will utilize the mental model framework.

The environment is a key factor in learning. The cognitive system forms a mental model of some part of the environment. Because realistic environments are very complex, categories are formed to enable the individual to map elements of the world to relatively simple mental models. These models are organized in hierarchies, from general to specific. Since all compete to find an adequate explanation of the environment, there is always a tension between the need to be specific enough to focus upon particularities of a situation and yet general enough to encompass the problem. Rules may be interrelated and organized into

concepts. Mental models provide the student with the means to organize and simplify his perceptions of the complex school environment.

Reality is mapped onto a mental model which, in turn, causes the person to view his environment in a different way and, consequently, alter his way of reacting to the environment. Such an interactionist approach is very much akin to Vygotsky's whereby he viewed the relationship between the individual and society as a dialectical process. Formal instruction is only one facet of the learning process. Experience also plays an important role. Through experience, students refine currently held models. At the grade seven/eight level, students have had eight or nine years of school experience from which to build mental models of their schooling.

This mental model theory was chosen as the methodological approach for the study because it is compatible with Vygotsky's theorizing. Complex and broad in nature, Vygotsky's theoretical framework is difficult to operationalize. Although his ideas about the schooling process are the main feature of the thesis, it was felt that utilization of the mental model theory would lead to the best operationalization of his views. Verbal reports facilitated the bridging of these two theories.

Verbal reports, as described by Ericsson and Simon (1984), provide indices to infer thought processes and, in fact, assume a position as a rich source of data in the study of cognitive processes and structures. A person constructs mental models of his social and physical environment as he constantly interacts with

this environment. These models are in a state of constant adaptation and integration. Through the verbal report, the subject describes his/her mental models and relays the information to the interviewer. Ericsson and Simon have argued that the process of vocalization does not interfere or inhibit thought processes. (1984). A categorization system which is generated from the reports is utilized to analyse the verbal protocols. Such an analysis provides the researcher with a useful tool to probe the students' perceptions of school.

Vygotsky stressed the dynamic relationship between the person and his environment. The social environment, particularly, is a major influence upon a student's intellectual development. "Lack of recognition among educators of this social process, of the many ways in which an experienced learner can share his knowledge with a less advanced learner, limits the intellectual development of many students; their capabilities are viewed as biologically determined rather than socially facilitated" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.126). The child gradually internalizes his/her social experience and subsequently reacts differently to it. The classroom is a highly social environment. Student interaction with a complex environment will be viewed, in the present study, from the perspective of the relevance of the situation. If the teacher fails to understand the impact of the social process in instruction, it is proposed, there will be a lack of relevance for the student.

The issue of relevance is directly associated with Vygotsky's concept of "the zone of proximal development", as defined earlier. School instruction must be aimed at the child's potential level, rather than his actual level, in order to stimulate development. Otherwise, a student is not appropriately challenged and motivated. It is suggested in the present study that a lack of tailored challenge, i.e. not enough or too much challenge, causes a lack of relevance from the student's perspective. As previously noted, the help of capable peers or teachers can provide the support needed to meet the challenge.

Norman (1980) discusses what he considers to be the most important twelve issues for cognitive science, issues which interact in a complex manner. Researchers tend to focus on one issue solely, he argues, disregarding the way it impinges upon the other issues. Certainly, one cannot study everything, but Norman urges researchers not to forget that fields of study such as learning, development, language, perception, behaviour, thought and skill, and several others, are very much inter-related and cannot be truly understood in isolation. To understand a single class of behaviour, one needs to understand a wide variety of behaviour. While limiting the area of study to a manageable and productive level, one must allow sufficient scope to consider the interaction of a broad range of issues. While relevance is a specific subject in the study of schooling, it encompasses a broad spectrum of inter-related issues. The present research, therefore, aims to maintain such a balance between specificity and holism.

### Objective

To study students' perceived relevance of their present school situation and of the preferred or ideal one.

The present study, then, is an attempt to overcome the limitations of the previous studies. It is designed to reveal the perceptions of the students as accurately and thoroughly as possible. The objective is to discover what is perceived to be relevant by the student as he interacts with his/her school environment; it is an examination of the students' formulation of the mental models of both the actual and the ideal school situation. An interview technique was chosen because it requires the student to generate ideas rather than react to those suggested or set down by the researcher. Less structured than a study using scales or questionnaires but more structured than an ethnographic study, the interview approach allows a focus on the pertinent issue, namely the subject of students' perceived relevance, while allowing the student to make as in-depth a response as he chooses.

Preliminary trials, in the form of a pilot study, provided results which confirmed the belief that students were, in fact, able to express their perceptions about their schooling. As well, the interview protocols provided the researcher with a structure for questioning in the main study, where a position somewhere between a quantitative and qualitative approach was taken.

The interviewer took a neutral yet compassionate stance so that the perceptions of the student would not be significantly

Influenced by the researcher. By means of this interview technique, data were procured which were subsequently analysed. An attempt was made to identify the interrelationships between the various factors which were deemed to be relevant. The difference between the actual and ideal school experience was characterized. One can see that the interview mode is best suited for this type of research which strives not only to describe but also to seek an explanation from the students of why they hold their particular views. Such an exploratory phase, relative to the issue of relevance, has apparently not been done in the past.

An investigative review of student perceptions of schooling by Weinstein (1983) confirmed the need for such qualitative research. "Researchers are just beginning serious investigations of the student point of view about classroom processes" (Weinstein, p.288). Past studies have tended to head in multiple directions, usually addressing one particular problem or issue, especially that of the teacher or student learning outcomes. The result has been a diverse, superficial body of literature which lacks integration and depth (Weinstein, p. 289). The reviewer advises more programmatic and theoretically directed research, attention to developmental milestones, along with an examination of the various methods of research. Good (1981, in Weinstein) argues that interview methods have not been thoroughly explored, both in relation to type of questions and interview context.

The present study may be viewed as a blending of theory, methodology and content. The theoretical framework will encompass

broad range of issues which directly address the schooling process. To operationalize the pertinent theories a methodology was devised. Through this process, data was collected and analysed. From the reader's perspective, the focus might be upon the theories and methodology, if one is a researcher. On the other hand, a teacher or educator might consider the content to have more bearing. Rather than be considered as having three separate levels, the writer perceives the research more as a continuum of the three domains.

## CHAPTER 2

### METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in two phases. An exploratory approach towards students' perceptions of the relevance of their schooling, a rather broad topic, suggested the need for a pilot study which would assist in identifying the major parameters of students' perceived relevance. Pairs of grade seven and eight students were presented with hypothetical but realistic school situations or problems containing various elements which students might face in their everyday schooling. Curriculum content, school routines, peer and teacher relationships were some of these elements. The students were asked for their reactions to the situations and/or what they would do if they were involved or how they might solve the problem. Students were free to interpret and respond to the questions in whichever way they deemed appropriate. Finally, the students were asked to describe what they felt would be the perfect class. Taking a non-restrictive course during the pilot study permitted a broad range of student responses, an important factor in research, as suggested by Norman(1980). Once the parameters had been identified, the second phase was conducted which consisted of semi-structured interviews based upon these parameters. With sufficient scope for freedom of expression but with a more directed focus than in the pilot study, the researcher aimed to further reveal the students' perceptions of their schooling. Pairs of students were asked to describe what they

perceive to be important in their schooling, to evaluate their current schooling and to compare it with the "ideal" or "preferred" situation. The difference between the two situations represents the discrepancy between the students' perceptions of the actual and the ideal school situation. The interviewer probed in an attempt to reveal why the students had these perceptions. To the extent that is possible, the ideas discussed were entirely student-generated. Therefore, the second phase, to be called the main study, with a greater number of pairs of students, utilized and refined the results from the pilot study, providing a more directed and in-depth study of the fundamental issues pertaining to the students' perceptions of relevance. These protocols were analysed and interpreted according to a categorization system which was developed from the verbal protocols in conjunction with the results of the pilot study.

### Population

The target population was grade seven and eight students in intermediate schools. Their ages ranged from eleven to fourteen. The student population is composed of children from varied socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds, of mostly middle class families, with a considerable number from a lower stratum. Students were selected from two schools, one school for the pilot study, to be called School B and, about equally from two schools for the main study, School A and School B. School B is composed of three grades - six, seven and eight whereas School A has only

grades seven and eight. Both schools are in an urban setting, each with enrolments of about three hundred students. The classes are of mixed abilities, with no formal streaming. Some students are enrolled in the English programme, others in Late French Immersion or Early French Immersion.

Grade seven and eight students were chosen, rather than high school students, because their school environment is more homogeneous. Generally, all students take the same subjects and follow the same curriculum. Eleven to thirteen year-olds are still fairly open and are very capable of abstract thinking and expressing their views.

An intermediate school is designed to assist students in the transition from elementary to high school. The students are on a rotary program, like high school, and have a limited choice of three electives per term. By the end of the two years at the school, they will have taken each elective at least once. Students have lockers, some of which have to be shared. There is a very active music program in each school as well as many sports activities and clubs. The majority of students travel by school bus; others use the city bus, ride bicycles or walk. There is a "late bus" two nights per week for those who need to stay late. Hence, the students who chose to be interviewed after school did not worry about transportation home. Most of the students eat their lunch at school.

## Pilot Study

### Introduction

The basic objective of this preliminary study was to broadly delineate the factors which intermediate students perceive to be important in their schooling. The study was designed to allow maximum freedom of expression, and directed at revealing the basic parameters of perceived relevance. Responses from twelve pairs of grade seven and eight students provided the data which were subsequently analysed and tabled.

### Sample

The sample for the pilot study was twenty-four grade seven and eight students in one intermediate school, School B, excluding students in special education classes. The students were chosen by a group of teachers as a cross-section of the student population. They were not chosen randomly because such a small sample might not have been representative of the students in general. The selected students were of different levels of achievement, abilities, personalities and interests. The researcher chose the pairs, by different combinations of grade and sex. Only a few students asked to be paired with their friends but this was discouraged. However, once the pairs were established, students were asked if they had any apprehensions about the choices. None expressed any concern.

Dyads were chosen to facilitate the flow of dialogue, to trigger ideas and to encourage openness. In preliminary trials before the pilot study, interviews with single students and triads were tried out. Interviews with single students proved to be less productive and quite stiff whereas triads were cumbersome because students had to wait their turn to speak and, in so doing, lost their train of thought.

### Procedure

The first step was to seek permission from the principal of the school. He readily agreed, foreseeing no problems with the research plan. Next, permission was obtained from the school board, who showed support and interest for the project. Twenty-four students were selected to participate in the study and permission was obtained from their parents. See Appendix A for a sample of the letter to parents. The students expressed their keenness to start and several parents asked to see the results of the study. A schedule was set up co-operatively, whereby the students chose their interview time, during lunch hour or after school. The researcher decided to conduct the interviews at these times rather than during actual class time in order that there would be no interference with the school program.

The interviews were conducted in the library office which was away from the busiest part of the school. The students who were interviewed at lunch ate their lunches, along with the interviewer; this allowed plenty of time for the interviews which

ranged between thirty to forty-five minutes. Those students who chose to be interviewed after school were able to walk home or take a late school bus.

The interviews were subsequently transcribed. The protocols were content-analysed.

### Interview

Introductions between students were made, although most knew each other. The students were very curious and interested in the study, asking many questions such as where the researcher went to school, what degree was being sought and why.

After this initial period of general discussion each pair of students was presented, in turn, with three imaginary scenarios which were short anecdotes encompassing several typical school situations or problems. The scenarios were developed by the researcher from her daily experiences as a teacher. They were based on real events which she had witnessed or which other students and teachers had described. These scenarios were printed on colored cardboard of which the students were each given a copy, as they were presented. The researcher read aloud the scenario while the two students followed along from their own copy. Then, after any clarification, the students were asked a number of questions which probed for their reactions to the scenarios. The students referred to their written copies repeatedly throughout the interview. The written representation seemed to help them better focus on the problem. The students were assured that what

they said would be held in strict confidence. Somewhat surprised, initially, to discover that what they said was going to be taped, they seemed satisfied and more at ease after the explanation that the interviews would be taped so that the researcher would not forget anything they had said. As little attention as possible was drawn to the machine.

Scenarios were used rather than direct, personal questioning because it was felt that the students would be more open in discussing a third-person, more hypothetical situation. The scenarios, which appear in Appendix B, were created from real school experiences. They were designed to touch upon any issues which might be related to relevance. Behaviour, curriculum content, teachers, school organization, peer relationships, homework etc. were some of the elements incorporated in the scenarios. The situations were briefly described to allow as much freedom of interpretation as possible, yet keeping to the general topic.

These exercises culminated in the following general question:

Suppose that you are a student in the perfect classroom.

Describe this classroom, how it is organized and how it is run. What are the most important things you would find in the perfect classroom?

### Interpretation and Results

The students expressed their enjoyment in participating in the study. Some were sorry when the interview was over. They took a very serious, genuine and concerned attitude toward the scenarios and frequently said that they knew someone or they themselves had had such an experience or felt the same way as the person in the scenario. They had no difficulty in expressing their views. The dyads proved to be very successful in encouraging dialogue and triggering responses from each other. Differences of opinion were encouraged by the interviewer. Questions were posed to reveal why the students felt the way they did and these questions led to further discussions. The interviewer maintained a neutral stance throughout and intervened only to probe further, to clarify, to keep the discussion on topic, or to discourage redundancy or dwelling on one aspect for too long.

Following are the factors which students perceived to be most important:

Of prime importance were the CHARACTERISTICS OF FELLOW CLASSMATES. Behaviour, ability range, compatibility with other students and personal traits were key elements in the class make-up.

Second in importance were the CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TEACHER. Personality, rapport with the class, ability to control and adjudicate, to show understanding, kindness and respect were stressed.

The LEARNING ENVIRONMENT followed as the next most important factor expressed by students. Work should be interesting, challenging and not boring. An element of fun should be included in the learning process. As well, active participation, discussions and group activities were looked upon most favourably.

PARENTAL CONTROL AND SUPPORT were considered to be vital for a student's success. Moderate surveillance and discipline in conjunction with genuine interest were considered to be very important.

HOMEWORK AND WORKLOAD elicited quite a serious concern. Students expressed a wish for a consistent homework load and a moderate amount of homework.

Finally, the PHYSICAL CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT was cited as a factor. A bright and cheerful atmosphere, with desks clustered in groups, was favoured by most students. Class size was also discussed.

Each of these major factors was subsequently broken down into components and presented in Appendix C. A summary of these tables appears in Table 1.

What most impressed the researcher was the students' willingness to share their views, their perspicacity and forthright responses. The experience gained by the researcher from the pilot study was most beneficial, particularly in terms of refining the interview techniques which were applied in the next phase of the research.

Table 1

Summary of Results from Pilot Study

Category	Description	Characteristics
Students' Characteristics	social composition of class, peers, fellow classmates and friends	Respectful (11) Responsible (9) Well-behaved (7) Friendly (6) No class clown (5)
Teachers' Characteristics	personality traits, teaching manner, behaviour, attitude	Communicates well (12) Moderate disciplinarian (12) Authoritarian figure (11) Flexible, allows some freedom (10) Friendly (9) Understanding (7) Helpful (7) Sense of humour (6) Fair (6) Punishes minimally (6) Respectful (5)
Learning Environment	actual learning experience, types of activities, teaching/learning process, learning atmosphere	Interesting (12) Work-oriented (11) Challenge (11) Fun, enjoyable (10) Student input (9) Freedom of choice Active participation (9) Variety of Activities (9) Social element-discussions (8) Games, play, drama (7) Groupwork (5) Less lecturing (5) Films (5) Relaxing atmosphere, not tense (5)
Homework	amount, difficulty, etc.	should be completed (10) Moderate amount (6) Even work load (6)

Note: Numbers in brackets represent the number of pairs of students who generated characteristic.

Analysis of the protocols was straightforward; the categories seemed to emerge clearly and patterns were easily detectable. Each protocol, in turn, seemed to fit the emerging pattern, although, as would be expected, there were individual differences.

From analysis of the protocols, it appeared that the concept of relevance had two dimensions. First, there is PRACTICAL RELEVANCE which is externally imposed. Students expressed that it was important to do well in school for the following reasons:

- a) future career
- b) future education, i.e. high school, college, university
- c) marks, report card
- d) to please parents and/or teachers
- e) rewards, i.e. trip, bicycle, money

Statements such as, "Just pretend you're interested. Well, you have to, or... you have to get good grades or else... your parents will be disappointed" and "It could go on your records, like on your resume" illustrate the students' perceptions of practical relevance.

Secondly, relevance was expressed in a more personal sense. One likes to learn for the fun of it, for the sense of personal satisfaction, to satisfy one's curiosity or for the challenge. PERSONAL RELEVANCE, a more elusive phenomenon, is seen in the comment "I'm just doing it for myself" and "it should be fun, something you want to do". Throughout the students' responses, these two dimensions of relevance were clearly manifest.

The question of whether school was or was not relevant for the students was not asked explicitly in the first phase of the study. Upon analysis, however, the verbal protocols indicated that school often lacked relevance for many students. Such comments as: "Because teachers just make you learn it; they don't make you interested in it" and "Some teachers, they talk all day and I wouldn't learn a thing. In one ear and out the other" are examples of comments on the lack of relevance. The words "fun", "interesting" and "boring" were expressed very frequently and by most students. "A classroom isn't really a classroom without fun." "If you don't have fun, it's boring." Yet, school was generally accepted by most because "because it brings you together with friends". "It's also when you learn things, too. Like if you learn new things, it's kind of interesting." For the students, the learning and social elements seemed to go hand in hand. Such interaction of the student with his social environment is a major tenet of Vygotsky, as mentioned earlier in the study.

The role of "the zone of proximal development" was apparent when students discussed the concept of challenge. Students clearly recognized the need for a reasonable challenge. "If you don't have a challenge, you don't develop" said one grade eight girl. Without some challenge, the work is dull and uninteresting. With too much challenge, the students experienced frustration and/or gave up. Throughout the analysis, the interplay between the social environment and the child's need to develop beyond his current mental level was evident. For example, friends and teachers help you when you don't understand, providing not only practical

assistance but also moral support. Good teachers, it was stated, help you to understand and do not make you feel "stupid" when you ask for help.

The pilot study was very useful as a preliminary phase for the study of students' perceived relevance. The pattern of factors which emerged provided a basic view of what students deem to be important in their schooling and what they would like it to be. The results suggested the need for questions that would require the students not only to discuss what they perceived to be important or desired but also to give more of an appraisal of their present situation with regard to perceived relevance. Consequently, questions were formulated for the second phase of the study which would assess the degree of perceived relevance and the difference between the students' mental models of the present situation and the ideal or preferred one. The difference would characterize the perceived lack of relevance. The concepts of personal and practical relevance were clearly distinguishable but it was unclear how the students integrated these ideas with their perceptions of their everyday schooling experience. A more conscious effort was made, in the main study, to observe the interrelationship between these ideas.

## Main Study

### Introduction

The purpose of the present, follow-up study was to investigate further the students' perceptions. By means of a more directed interviewing technique, and a larger sample than in the pilot study, the researcher looked for a deeper understanding of what students perceived to be relevant in their schooling and how these perceptions compared with those of the ideal or preferred situation. In conjunction with the main categories established in the pilot study and by reading through the protocols, a coding grid was developed to assist in the analysis of the protocols. It was not the purpose of the study to develop the grid, however.

### Sample

The sample was extended to two intermediate schools, School A and School B, to include fifty students in grade seven and eight, almost equally distributed between the two schools, excluding special education classes. (School A - 12 pairs; School B - 13 pairs) Students were paired by different combinations of grade, sex and programme. As in the pilot study, the students were selected by a group of teachers, in each school, to represent a cross section of the student population. This method of selection was considered to be more appropriate than a random selection, due to the relatively small size of the sample.

### Procedure

The time chosen to conduct the interviews was the last two weeks in May and the first two in June. This was an appropriate time because the students were very familiar with their environment, having spent almost one year in the class. As the year was drawing to a close, it seemed natural for the students to look back over their term at the school. The grade eights were advancing to high school in the fall.

Permission was granted by the principal of each school and by the Department of Research and Development of the school board.

A visit to school A was made to deliver the permission forms and to present the principal with an outline of the research plan. A liaison teacher was asked to oversee the selection of the students, to contact the students, to seek parental permission and to arrange the interview schedule.

The next step was to call together the students, in small groups, in School B. The students were given a general idea of the project and invited to participate. Those who agreed obtained permission from their parents. A copy of this letter of permission appears in Appendix D. The students responded very positively to the request and seemed honoured to be asked. One student, in School B, said that he did not wish to participate. He had been in some trouble with the interviewer, in the earlier part of the year; he obviously felt uncomfortable about the interview. Another

student was substituted. Many parents expressed an interest in the study and asked to see the results upon completion.

Interview schedules were set up. The times had to be mutually agreed upon by the interviewer and the students, which sometimes was difficult due to extra-curricular activities, sickness, impromptu meetings etc. In school B, the students were interviewed at lunch time or after school, over a period of about a month. In school A, they were interviewed during class time, again over a period of about one month, at the rate of three interviews per afternoon session. In spite of the careful organization, illness, field trips, tests and last minute plans sometimes caused a few scheduling problems.

In School A, students were called over the intercom; in this way, students did not have to wait if the previous interview was lengthy. In School B, students were reminded of their interview in the morning. However, one student, who went home at the end of the day, remembered her appointment, raced back and did not seem the worse for wear!

The interviews were conducted in a small office, in School B, and in an empty classroom, in School A. The interviewer and students sat together around a table. None of the students expressed any concerns about giving up their time or appeared to be in a hurry to finish. The teachers were very co-operative, allowing students to miss a class. At no time did there appear to be any annoyance expressed over the inconvenience.

At the beginning of each interview, the researcher introduced herself and explained why she wanted to interview the students. Some of the students knew each other and others were introduced. Most were extremely interested in the project and asked questions such as what type of degree she was working towards, how long it would take to complete the thesis, where she went to school and why she was doing this. She likened the thesis to a very long project; students understood this concept because they have to do several projects each year. This period was important because it acted as an ice-breaker and also gave the researcher an opportunity to adapt to the students.

An interview is seen as a "field of social-psychological forces" (Gorden, 1975, p. 123). "One has to balance information-gathering with rapport building" in order to "achieve maximum information with optimal interpersonal relations" (p.123).

Factors which inhibit and facilitate an interview were considered (Gorden, 1975). Particularly effective is a sympathetic understanding of the students' point of view. Such comments as "I can imagine how you must have felt" or "Yes, I see your point" were very effective in establishing an accepting atmosphere. A climate of trust was created; the students soon became aware, during the course of the interview, that the interviewer was not going to judge their answers or become actively involved in their discussion. This neutral stance allowed greater freedom of expression for the students because they felt unthreatened by the interviewer. Gorden warns that an ego threat can be a serious

barrier to the flow of information. At all times, it was important to make the respondent comfortable, both socially and psychologically, in order that he/she would be willing and able to respond freely. If a student seemed to lack self-confidence, an effort was made to boost his/her confidence through encouraging comments. The students were encouraged to feel that all their ideas were worthy of consideration. Also, it was important that there were no competing demands for time. Students were asked if the time was convenient and, at times throughout the interview, if they were being kept too long.

The students were encouraged to dialogue with each other, to agree or disagree throughout the interview and, if they did not have an answer to a particular question, they need not feel compelled to give one. The researcher explained that what they said would be strictly confidential, that only the researcher would listen to the tapes and that when the interviews were transcribed on paper their names would not appear. Therefore, it was stressed, their responses would be anonymous. The students accepted this without question and did not seem to care whether it would be anonymous or not. Taping the interviews seemed to be somewhat of a surprise but when it was explained that the researcher did not want to forget anything that they had said, they appeared rather flattered and, within minutes, seemed to forget that they were being taped.

Prior to the actual interview, each pair of students viewed a short videotape. Composed of several students informally discussing what is important to them in their schooling, the video was used as a trigger, to help initiate discussion and to act as a model for the students. To create the eight-minute video, short segments of longer discussions were pieced together resulting in a cross-section of ideas, rather than a complete discussion.

The scenarios utilized in the pilot study were successful in eliciting a broad range of responses. From these the basic parameters of students' perceived relevance emerged. However, a more directed focus was sought in the main study. The purpose of the video, in conjunction with specific interview questions, was to provide such a focus. This would allow the researcher to seek a deeper understanding of what students perceive to be relevant in their schooling.

The making of the videotape was quite a complicated procedure. The first attempt failed dismally. Several students were taped in a studio at the university during the Christmas vacation. The studio was a foreign place to the students and they were preoccupied with Christmas and unable to relate to the questions which they were asked. It became clear that the best place to interview students was in their own school during an actual school day. A random group of students, sixteen in all, was asked to stay after school to talk about school. About three hours of discussion was taped over two days and the tape was edited to about ten minutes. This editing process was complicated and

time-consuming, especially since there were three tape sizes involved in the conversion. In fact, creating the short video proved to be the most frustrating part of the project.

The effort proved to be worthwhile, however; the video seemed to be effective in stimulating thought and providing a guide for the students. It helped to ease the students into a foreign situation by showing them a group of students sharing ideas in a fairly relaxed setting. Given the relatively short time frame for each interview, the video provided a model which, in the researcher's estimation, permitted a greater depth of student response in as direct a manner as possible. They rarely referred to the tape, except to comment upon a student they recognized, and when asked after the interview if the tape had coloured their thinking, they said it merely provided them with a format of the interview rather than the actual content. None said that it changed their views; therefore, it appeared to have minimal bearing upon their responses. This can be confirmed by reviewing the verbal protocols; the students had no dearth of their own ideas and no difficulty in expressing them. As well, the data from the pilot study, which did not utilize the video, was quite consistent with the data from the main study. The video protocol may be found in Appendix E.

### Interview

Having viewed the video, the students were presented with a series of questions. Usually, the same order was followed for each pair of students. Following are the basic questions presented to each group:

1. What things do you think are most important in your schooling? (the term "important" was used because it was felt to be the closest to "relevance" and yet be understandable)
2. What do the other students feel, do you think, are the most important things in their schooling?
3. Which is the most important (from above) to you? Which is the second most important, etc.?
4. Without using any names, how would you describe your present schooling experience? Would you rate it as excellent, good, average, fair or poor?
5. How do you think the other students would describe their present schooling experience?
6. Looking at your different classes overall, how much improvement would be required to change your present class to a perfect class - a lot, a medium amount, a small amount, or none?

7. When do you feel that you are really interested in what you are doing at school?
8. When do you feel that you are really learning a lot at school?
9. Imagine that you are a student in the "perfect" (or ideal, excellent) class in a "perfect" school. Describe this schooling experience.  
(Prompt students to describe the items they have mentioned in question #1, i.e. classmates teacher, learning environment, challenge, workload, physical environment etc.)

The interviewer gave the students thinking time, which might seem obvious, but could easily be overlooked. Questions, such as the ones above, required much thinking on the part of the student. He/she needed time to ponder, without constant interruption or pressure from the interviewer. The students had ample opportunity to answer a question before another was presented. The interviewer repeatedly asked if they had more to say about a certain subject before moving on to the next question. From the responses to the questions, other questions were formulated which allowed a more in-depth understanding of the dynamics underlying the students' perceptions. An example:

Student- We are doing debating and I think it is really interesting.

Interviewer- Do you know why you think that? Do you have a reason?

Student- Well, I'm sort of a person who likes to speak up about things, like my Dad. So I think that's why.

A successful technique to elicit why a student held certain views was to repeat, very briefly, what he had just said, in the form of a statement. Inevitably, this would result in the student explaining his reason for saying that. When value judgments were made, it was useful to ask for specific concrete events to back up the generality (Gorden, 1975, p.119). Inferential questions which confused the students were either rephrased or broken into more simple steps.

The interview sessions ranged from thirty to fifty minutes. The students had a great deal to say and did not seem at all hesitant after the stiffness of the initial two or three minutes. Some students would have talked for hours if they had been given the opportunity. In fact, several students came back after school to add a few comments which they had thought of later. To avoid possible ethical problems, the students were asked not to mention specific teachers' or students' names. Most adhered to this but a few did insist upon naming individuals. This is not surprising because students do base their perceptions upon personal experience. The interviewer adopted the students' language, almost unconsciously, and found herself frequently using words such as: like, yeh, uhm, you know, sort of. A non-judgmental stance was

maintained although sympathy was expressed by the interviewer if a student described a problem he was experiencing. Perhaps this helped to establish a more comfortable rapport with the students.

The interviews were subsequently transcribed and content-analysed. Transcription of the twenty-five protocols was a lengthy procedure. Use of a transcribing machine, with foot pedal to control the start, forward and reverse, helped to facilitate the process. Segments of conversation were divided, one idea per line. The lines were numbered as were the protocols. Once the protocols were typed, they were edited twice, mainly to ensure precision of transcription as well as to sort out any garbled parts as much as possible. Also, if the two students were of the same sex, particularly girls, it was often difficult to differentiate between the two. Perhaps this factor might be considered for future research when students are being paired.

Upon completion of the transcription, the protocols were thoroughly read. At the same time, common terms used by the students were classified under the main categories established in the pilot study, i.e. teachers, classmates, learning environment, parents, homework and physical environment. These categories encompassed all the terms which the students generated.

Characteristics were then organized and placed under sub-categories; overlapping terms and related terms were grouped. Since the terms were obtained through an exploratory process, they were not predetermined. It became apparent that some terms seemed redundant, but they were maintained because the students perceived

them as distinctly different. Also, the same term might be viewed from different points of view; these were similarly retained, although at first glance they may seem redundant to the reader. For example, "the teacher should balance the amount of work and fun" shows a different slant than "there should be a balance of work and fun in the classes". The former places the onus upon the teacher while the latter describes the preferred learning environment. This duplication created a problem for the researcher and the judges, however, in the coding process. It was sometimes difficult to ascertain the point of view of the student. More will be said about this problem in the conclusion of the study. Although the students' actual wording is maintained to a large extent, liberty was taken to use a more adult word if it conveyed the students' meaning more succinctly. The adapted grid, which was obtained from studying the protocols, was then used to code the statements; the frequency of response was tabulated. The protocols were analysed a third time, to ensure that the experimenter had not overlooked pertinent information. The coding grid appears in Appendix G.

#### Limitations of the Study

The present design was not without its weaknesses. Although the researcher consistently strived to refrain from intervention during the interview sessions, the nature of her role was to guide discussion, and to probe for greater depth and breadth wherever possible. Sometimes the interviewer would interrupt to search for reasons behind a statement or to clarify what had been said. Some

students would stray off-topic or become hooked on one particular problem. Also, the interviewer was bound to influence the situation simply by her presence and manner.

The basic set of questions was presented to each pair of students to ensure coverage of the issues under study but the probing questions were adapted to each interview. The questions were more or less a springboard for discussion; the interviewer searched for the reasons behind the answers. It was these answers that proved to be most revealing. In some interviews, one student would take a dominant role which may have hindered the other student from expressing his views. The interviewer tried to balance this by directing questions to one or the other. Some students knew each other and others did not; this did not seem to be a barrier to communication.

Use of the videotape might have influenced the students' responses. Although they stated that it merely showed them the format for the interview and did not influence their thinking, this could not be proven.

The sample may seem small when compared to quantitative research. As qualitative research, on the other hand, twenty-five lengthy interviews is considerably larger than many such studies. A limiting factor is the transcription of the interviews which is a very lengthy procedure requiring about six hours for every hour recorded. Transcription of the interviews took approximately one hundred hours. Further, analysis of the protocols was extremely time-consuming. Although this time could not be measured, the

protocols were each analysed at least seven times. Therefore, the sample might be considered large when one considers the time for transcription and analysis.

Protocol analysis is subject to the researcher's judgment, although a concerted effort was made to avoid excessively imposing one's interpretation. In addition, a check on the reliability of the analysis was conducted in an attempt to prevent the imposition of the researcher's perspective. Two sample protocols were coded by two independent judges using the established grid. Their evaluations were compared against each other's and those of the researcher. Utilizing a pair-wise deletion technique which counted only pairs of assigned codes, the percentage of agreement between the judges and the researcher was: Judge A - 85% and 91%, Judge B - 93% and 92%, respectively, for the two protocols. Between the two judges, the percentage of agreement was 83% and 85%, respectively. The judges tended to under-code the protocols in comparison to the researcher; unfamiliarity with the task might have caused this. Therefore, a percentage rating without utilizing the pair-wise deletion technique was also given; results of this comparison appear in Appendix F, along with a more detailed explanation of the procedure used in judging the coding of the protocols.

One had to rely upon the teachers' judgments that the sample was, in fact, a cross section of the school population. The group might not have represented the distribution of students in the classroom. As well, every school has a unique character which is

certain to influence the students' attitudes and colour the overall impression presented. For example, there seemed to be a somewhat imposed school pride in School A. Students gave the impression that they "should speak highly" of their school, even if their other comments did not always confirm such a feeling. This attitude did not seem to prevent the students from being candid. Such an attitude was not apparent in School B. The reader will see from the results that this perception on the part of the researcher was not confirmed in the protocol analysis.

Notwithstanding, the researcher concluded that this research design was most conducive to satisfying the objective, that is, to find out what students perceive to be relevant in their schooling.

## CHAPTER 3

## PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Each protocol had a unique character. One could almost "hear" the students in discussion while reading the protocols. The researcher became very familiar with each protocol after analysing it several times. Some students were quite brief while others discussed at length. The protocols ranged from ten to twenty-two typed pages. The time length of each interview did not necessarily equal the page length; it depended also upon the rate of speaking. One interview seemed very short but, because the boy spoke so rapidly, it resulted in being one of the longest protocols. A sample coded protocol appears in Appendix H.

## Main Categories

The first question the students were asked was "What things do you think are most important in your schooling?" The word "education" was not used because it might have also incorporated learning out of the school setting. Each pair was asked to list co-operatively what they considered to be the most important things in their "schooling". Then, they were asked to rank these things in order of importance. Although the list was compiled co-operatively by the pair, each student was asked to rank them individually. Table 2 illustrates the students' top three choices.

Table 2

Individual Students' First Three Choices - Perceived School Relevance

Characteristic	First Choice	Second Choice	Third Choice	Total
Learning Environment	12	21	9	46/50
Teacher	17	13	14	44/50
Classmates	15	12	13	36/50
Practical Relevance	3	2	2	7/50
Personal Relevance	2	0	4	6/50
Parents	1	2	2	5/50
Homework	0	0	0	0/50
Physical Environment	0	0	0	0/50

The three broad categories mentioned most frequently were: the teachers, classmates, and the learning environment. These three categories were relatively equivalent in the students' weighting. Students' perceptions of the relevance of their schooling also emerged, as well as the importance of parents. Homework and the physical environment were given a lower priority. Each student gave at least two factors which were most important.

Those terms mentioned most frequently will now be discussed, with excerpts from the protocols, to give a flavour of the students' perceptions. Each sample interview is followed by the number of the interview and of the line(s); for example, (12:37-41) refers to interview twelve, lines thirty-seven to forty-one. Tables will show the main and sub-categories, their characteristics along with the frequency of response by pairs of students; an interview sample will be provided for each characteristic.

### Classmates

The characteristics of classmates were divided into two groups: academic and social. Academic characteristics refer to how the student performs, his effort and attitude towards his work. Social characteristics, on the other hand, refer to the students' interrelationships with fellow students and teachers. Table 3 illustrates these characteristics, the frequency with which they were expressed by pairs, and samples from the interviews.

Perceived Classmates' Characteristics and Interview Samples for Pairs of Grade 7 and 8 Students

Characteristic	Frequency	Interview Sample
<u>Academic Category</u>		
working - puts forth effort	19	For students who aren't as smart, they'd still have to, like, reach...they'd have to think and use their brain, you know, and even smart people would have to do all that stuff (8:394-399).
attentive	12	(In the ideal class) more students that pay attention, because some people just don't pay attention (17: 399-400).
positive attitude	10	.....by the end of primary school, they could tell which of the kids would like to learn and I'd prefer to put those kids who want to learn, in one class. You don't learn anything when people act up (4:80-85).
participates	9	I think all the people in a class, like the teacher and the students and everything have to participate to make it (13:149-151).
willing to learn	5	If you're not willing to learn and adapt, then there's no reason that you should be going to school (6:353-356).
enthusiastic, interested	4	When people join in and do something in the school spirit, when they enjoy what they're doing (6:341-343).
<u>Social Category</u>		
friends	25	I think everybody likes their friends. That's why I think everybody looks so forward to coming to school...(1:7-9).
well-behaved, polite	23	.....in our class, there are some bad people who are always talking, and, because of this, we don't get that many opportunities to have fun (4:178-181).
social place	22	If you don't have friends, you wouldn't want to come to school (24:65-66).
gets along, co-operative	17	.....work as a group to go through their daily work (22:155).
respectful	16	They should be friendly, like, they shouldn't put you down (9: 327-328).
not noisy	14	Overall, get rid of the talkers, zip up their mouths or something like that and then it would help (18:229-231).
helpful, encouraging	14	I'd say having friends is important because you get to talk about your problems. Sometimes it's hard to talk to adults about your problems (23:25-28).
gets along with teachers	7	Cause I like all my teachers and I have fun with them. (2:209-210)
not "hyper", mature	5	.....it's just like, at times, there's a time for being hyper and there's a time for doing work (12:53-55).
understanding	4	They, like, speak the same language; they can help you understand concepts better than a teacher could (16:101-103).

Most outstanding was the importance of friends in school and in class. Each of the twenty-five pairs discussed the importance of friends. "If you have friends, it helps a lot, too. Because then you feel, like, good inside and you want to work. But if you don't have any friends, then you kinda feel like a little, small person in the class and you feel really stupid" (12:65-71). School is seen as a social place by most students who meet many of their friends there. Friends provide support; they can help each other with their work or to cope with problems. Students like to have some of their friends in the same class. "Friends make it fun" (1:47).

As much as school is perceived as a social place, where one enjoys the company of one's friends, those friends and classmates should be well-behaved and polite, and also respectful of each other and the teacher. They should not impede others' learning. As seen in Table 3, twenty-three pairs mentioned the former characteristic and sixteen the latter. Friends who want to "fool around all the time" can really "pull you down" (1:60-61). Fourteen pairs thought that students should not be noisy in class. Again, people who are talking too often or too loudly prevent others from learning. A suggestion was to "throw them out". One pupil thought that students should be grouped in classes according to their attitude towards learning. Also, students should help each other and try to get along with one another. They "rely on their friends to help them out" (17:115) or ask their friends for help because they are too embarrassed to ask the teacher.

Students should work hard and put forth a genuine effort. Nineteen of the twenty-five pairs of students stressed this. In the ideal class, "...you'd have to work; it wouldn't be like a piece of cake" (8: 384-385). It is neither appropriate to discuss your "social life" in class time, nor for the students or the teacher to "waste" time. When asked what sort of students would be in the ideal class, it was "ones who pay attention, like,... would study hard and do all their work" (17:370-372). Other characteristics of classmates which students perceived to be important were attentiveness, a positive attitude towards learning and willingness to participate.

Friends and fellow classmates rank very high in students' perceptions of their schooling. The school as a social place is considered to be vital by the students. Interestingly, it is perceived that social influences, while very important, must not hinder the learning process. Most students want to learn and resent any students who either impede their learning directly, or indirectly by monopolizing the teacher. Two students liked kids "to act up" in class, but in moderation; a few "rowdies" provided entertainment. But this feeling was clearly the exception

The social dynamics in a class are integrally related with teachers and the learning environment. Such interrelationships will be considered after these two major categories and their most frequently occurring characteristics have been described.

## Teachers

Students perceived teachers to be very important in their schooling. Their professional characteristics, along with their personal characteristics, were considered most carefully. Teachers "are probably the biggest influence on it [schooling]" (18:211).

Table 4 contains the teachers' characteristics which are perceived to be important, their frequency of expression and sample interviews. Since the list of characteristics was lengthy, a few related terms were grouped. Twenty-two of the twenty-five pairs of students stressed that a teacher should be able to explain the lesson well in order that the students clearly understand: "Having good teachers, like teachers that help explain things thoroughly, so that you can understand them properly" (13:5-7). Nineteen pairs stressed that there should be "good" teachers. This includes proficiency, confidence and organization. Good teachers present the lesson and then involve the students in a discussion. They help those students who do not understand and do not make them feel "stupid" or afraid to ask. "In the ideal class, everybody basically understands what they're doing and what they're being taught. Then I think that would be pretty neat" (5:330-332). Students regarded most of their teachers quite highly. While it seemed that the majority were good, there was usually "one" that caused a lot of concern. Because students were asked not to give names, it could not be ascertained definitely whether it was the same "one" each time, although this was strongly suspected to be the case. Since the students are on a

Table 4

Perceived Teachers' Characteristics and Interview Samples for Pairs of Grade 7 and 8 Students

Characteristic	Frequency	Interview Sample
<u>Professional Category</u>		
understandable, explains well	22	But that's what teachers are there for, to help you understand it if you don't (6:449-450). It's your job; that's what you're paid for. Serious teaching! (3:478-479).
proficient - good, confident, organized	19	I think the teachers, if they become teachers, should have an idea how to calm kids down (2:261-262).
good student-teacher relationship (S.T.R.)	18	I mean, if you don't get along with your teacher, right away, then it ruins the rest of the year (19:27-29).
balance - strictness	17	If you have a really strict teacher and a mean teacher that does everything by the book, you have more trouble learning. If you have a free teacher that likes to joke around, it's more fun to learn (2:136-140).
control	16	I prefer a teacher who can be, like, understanding, and, at one point, if you have been misbehaving really bad, she can be strict (25:25-28).
not lecturing	11	Sometimes you feel that the teacher's rambling on and on about something. You start, you start to look at the clock and wonder how long this is going to last. And like, you start, your brain starts to wander off in different places. It's like you've got your head in the clouds or something like that (6:293-300).
punishes minimally	10	Is he [teacher] going to get me for some little thing I didn't do? .....I'm worried too much about that (3:607-610).
no favorites, does not pick on one	8	...they don't have a teacher's pet, and they don't have a person they hate and they always bug (5:233-236).
balance - fun and control	4	If you have a teacher that is strict but he has, he likes, really enthusiastic sometimes, that's fun (23:8-10).

table continues

Table 4 (continued)

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Interview Sample</u>
<u>Personal Category</u>		
helpful, gives attention	19	Some of the teachers aren't that great; they say "Well, here's your work and do it" (21:153-155) [and] ...like some teachers when they're teaching the thing, they don't go into it, like. They teach it, like, five seconds, and then they expect you to do something with it (7:20-22).  I learn a lot when the teacher explains it thoroughly (7: 235).
friendly, nice, approachable	18	I like most teachers I have. I like being good friends with them. Cause Mr. X and I, like... he's always asking me, he's always joking around. It kind of brightens up my day (12:533-537).
communicative	16	Like, some of the teachers want to help you but they help you in the wrong way. Yeh, like they really can't reach you. They just explain it, they help you but...(and the other partner adds) you don't understand it, and they start yelling at you for not listening in class (12:201-208).
fun	14	If the teacher is sort of like, even have a quality of one of the kids - fun loving (25:443-445).
understanding	13	[An understanding teacher] kind of like realizes how we want the class; he asks us how to make the class better (12:183-184). [And it could be] not only for school work; it could be also for just talking over your problems (13:273-274).
motivating, animated, enthusiastic, not boring	13	I feel interested when the teacher starts acting out things and really getting into it. When they get excited about what they're doing (6:255-258). It's just like he's trying to keep to himself, you know, teach what he has to and go home (6:67-69).
not yelling, not frightening	13	[In an ideal class] the teacher wouldn't have to yell at us and, I don't know, I just think it would be a lot funner (3:648-652).  Some people are really shy and they won't come to the teachers if they're yelling at them (24:124-125).  I mean, in one of the teacher's math classes, I go in it and I am afraid, I mean, I'm more worried about him than the lesson, you know? (3:602-605).

table continues

Table 4 (continued)

Characteristic	Frequency	Interview Sample
sense of humour	12	.....if he kept, cracked jokes, but kind of under control, like, if he did it at the right time, you know (11:304-306).
not mean, not mad	11	If they are really crabby or something, they've had a hard day or something, that turns you off, and turns you into a grouch (16:312-314).
fair	10	Robots also would be helpful in that they would be fair (14:442).
caring, considerate, co-operative	10	Like the teacher who lets you come in out of the rain (16:315-316).
encouraging, not critical	10	If your teacher is really nice to you, and kept cheering you on, trying to get you to do it, like you try harder than if the teacher kept putting you down (18:37-40).
relaxed, patient	9	Patient teachers, always being there when you need them (13:271-272).
happy, positive attitude	9	[If you have] a cheerful teacher, then you have a cheerful class (6:506-507).
interesting, creative	9	When the teacher has a special way of saying it (12:489).
respectful	8	Maybe if you argue, the teacher will respect you (14:123).
balance - serious/fun	7	I think teachers should mix education and fun in, just not be strict and uptight (16:30-32).
listens	7	They don't just jump on you; they should listen to what you have to say (22:32-34).

rotary system, many share the same teachers. "And then we have another teacher and he just sort of goofs off all the time" (9:132). Supply teachers who did not understand the rules or routines caused problems for the students. Although this was not a reason for being rude or disrespectful, it was felt that the teacher should be qualified to teach the particular subject, especially where safety was involved, such as physical education.

Students value a good student-teacher relationship; this was deemed important by eighteen pairs of students, as noted in Table 4. "A teacher who you can talk to about, like your problems and stuff" (12:14-15). It is important to have a teacher that you like. Students will work hard if they like the teacher; they admit that they will go out of their way not to learn for a teacher whom they really dislike. If a teacher is too strict and "just wants you to work, work, work all the time ..... you won't, you'll go against them for doing that" (12:214-219). However, it is a reciprocal arrangement: "I say kids should have a better attitude towards your [their] teacher, like, it's not only the teacher putting in the effort to make them feel at home; they have to, they have to put in their effort, too" (22:133-137). On the other hand, the teacher is not one of the group. A teacher is expected to maintain a certain distance. He/she is not to pry or become involved in the students' private affairs. This is just as bad as a teacher who is cold and unapproachable.

This balance is also perceived in viewing the teacher as too serious or too comical, too strict or too lenient. As much as a

sense of humour is highly valued, a teacher should be "serious at serious times" (6:361). Conversely, sixteen pairs stressed that a teacher should be an authoritarian figure and have good control of the students. A teacher who can balance control and freedom seems most acceptable. A teacher who is too strict is just as bad as one who has little control. However, control is not entirely dependant upon the teacher: "I think a good balance is important, of discipline and not, but, you know, if the kids weren't so rotten, you wouldn't have to worry about it" (3:614-618). But teachers who overly excited the class and then became angry and punished the class were perceived as being unfair. A few teachers were perceived as having no control. Students did not favour such lack of control and complained bitterly. A few were quite cynical and explained how they "conned" such a teacher regarding homework, lines, marks and skipping classes.

Lecturing was perceived more as a teacher trait than a method of teaching. About half of the students expressed their disapproval of teachers who talked too much. "You'll just start hating the teacher while you are in the class, blabbering anything, everything" (20:113-115). Students perceive that they do not learn as much when they sit and listen to the teacher every day. What is particularly annoying is when the teacher talks off the subject for a whole period and then assigns a large amount of homework.

The teacher's personal characteristics were described at length. Nineteen pairs appreciated a helpful teacher, one who

gives attention to the students when needed. Students liked to get help from the teacher but often were unable due to large classes. The majority of students felt that classes should be comprised of about twenty students. "I want the teacher, if I lift my hand, it won't be till the end of class that she comes around" (8:455-456). Interestingly, one student felt that teachers tend to "concentrate on the students that do well in classes" (9:342-343). Eighteen pairs of students stated that they valued teachers who are friendly, "nice" and approachable. Students are more likely to work hard for a friendly teacher and to ask for help.

Effective communication seems to be the key to success: "...willing to communicate with the students - I think that, that would be the best kind of teacher" (6:375-377). A teacher's ability to communicate seems an elusive characteristic. In the ideal school, teachers would relate to students more, not in a lecturing way, but sharing ideas about the lessons, through discussions: "we talk back and forth" (3:329). Perhaps a teacher might say: "Oh, that's a good question" or "I wanted someone to ask that"; not just "I don't know, read it out of the textbook" (8:404-407).

A "good" teacher is one who puts in some fun, occasionally. "Fun" can be work, where "you learn stuff from it" (1:205). Teachers who are fun teach in "a fun way" where "everybody would learn" (11:44-45). With one teacher "everybody would come out and say he's a really nice guy. They would always talk about what they learned so...it's the only way I think you can learn" (11:45-48).

Teaching in "a fun way" is perceived as a teacher characteristic because the teacher plans the activities. However, because it is closely related to the kinds of activities performed by the class it will be discussed further under the heading "learning environment".

In the ideal class, teachers would be understanding. Such a teacher would listen to your point of view or your side of the story. "Teachers shouldn't jump into conclusions and stuff, like, they should give you a chance to explain, cause it'll help them clear up a situation" (12:80-84). An understanding teacher will "let you come in out of the rain!" (16:315-316). One student went so far as to say that, no matter how badly he thought of a subject before, if a teacher considers how the student feels and tries to make the lesson as interesting and creative as possible, then "I think that practically fixes everything" (20:328). Helpful teachers are much appreciated. One teacher "wouldn't help my problem any more; she'd make it worse" (11:693-694).

Teachers who "get you interested", who are motivating, enthusiastic and animated, are "not boring". "It's not only boring, it's you don't learn" (11:29-30). Teachers who "just stand there and talk to you" are dull whereas those who "walk around, and actions and stuff, ..... and make you involved in the lesson" promote interest (5:340-343). One student commented upon the age of the teacher: "it also depends on their age; like, really old teachers, I find they're boring" (12:257-258).

Thirteen pairs of students, as seen in Table 4, stated that they disliked a teacher who yelled frequently or who was frightening. Yelling is perceived not necessarily as a loud voice but as any verbal disapproval, even if spoken in a normal voice. Instead of yelling, teachers could deduct marks or give extra homework, if students did not do their work. Teachers who explain in a pleasant manner are more likely to establish a better relationship with the students. Also, if the teacher is annoyed at one person, "the whole class shouldn't be yelled at" (1:55-56). Nor should the whole class be punished if only a few have misbehaved. "That really bugs me about school too" (1:69). "Nice" teachers do not have to sacrifice control of their classes. "You know, they can laugh and everything but if you do something wrong, they'll be strict" (23:222-223). Again, the relationship is a reciprocal one; "the student reacts the way a teacher reacts" (11:61).

Teachers who are "not mean" or "not mad" are best. "If they are really crabby or something, they've had a hard day or something, that really turns you off and turns you into a grouch" (16:314-315). In the perfect class "you could talk to your teachers and they wouldn't get mad" (1:379-380). Also, teachers should be fair in their dealings with students. Overly harsh punishments or punishing the whole class when only a few are to blame is considered unfair.

Caring teachers who consider the students' point of view and who try to co-operate with the students are valued. If a student

falls a test, the teacher won't just say "Okay, you failed the test; bad boy" but will say "Try again next time" (18:48-51). Teachers who are encouraging, not critical, are more likely to elicit an effort from the students. Students and teachers should "work as a group to go through their daily work" (22:155). Also, it was noted by one student that she would "like to see the teachers get along cause I know some teachers don't get along in this school" (1:441-443). This would be an asset because it would allow the teachers to discuss their classes more freely.

The list of teacher characteristics was long and comprehensive. The influence of the teacher is obviously great. Friendliness and the ability to communicate, both on an academic level and on a personal level are key elements in effective teaching. Negative, harsh or threatening teachers seem to turn students away from learning and build resentment. Although a teacher would have to be a saint to qualify as a perfect teacher, the students readily admitted that nobody was perfect and that a teacher was only human.

### Learning Environment

The learning environment encompasses any learning activity performed by the students. Students discussed various aspects of the curriculum, the climate for learning, the workload and the controls in the classroom. Socio-educational and experiential factors were also considered. These characteristics and further interview samples may be seen in Table 5.

Table 5

Perceived Learning Environment Characteristics and Interview Samples for Pairs of Grade 7 and 8 Students

Characteristic	Frequency	Interview Sample
<u>Curriculum Related Category</u>		
subjects	23	[To the question of what is most important to you in your schooling] Well, I guess it's English and math (20:8).
drama	13	I am very interested in drama and I want to be an actress when I grow up and I enjoy classes very much (13:244-246).
phys. ed., sports	12	I'm really athletic and I like being in athletics (18:270-271).
electives	9	.....the electives because they're really fun, they are a break from the normal, boring stuff (20:48-50).
music	5	Yeh, I'm in vocal. I didn't think much of singing until I joined this (11:430). I think you should get as broad a learning as possible, like, not just subjects like math, science - like other things if possible, like the elective program (25:13-17).
extra-curricular activities	5	.....because it sort of makes you want to come to school (24:34).
<u>Climate for Learning Category</u>		
fun	2:	The teachers could a little bit more, [put] a little bit more fun into the thing, without just giving you strictly work (22:193-195).
not boring	17	I just don't know, school is sort of dragging on and on and on for me. I don't know why ... (18:163-165). Everything seems to be fun, not boring (24:143-144).
interesting, exciting	12	Like, I used to hate history but now I have a different teacher, in my own way, and she always makes things really interesting (7:240-243).
discovery (research), creative	11	.....we had an archaeology dig and we found lotsa stuff (12:449-450).
challenge	11	I like work that you have sort of a challenge, instead of just, well, it's so easy that you know the answers. Like it's not even a challenge (13:310-313).  If you can beat the challenge, then you know that you can do some more. And then you know you're really learning something (4:419-421).

table continues

Table 5 (continued)

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Interview Sample</u>
<u>Control Category</u>		
choices	13	I think I would enjoy it more if it were more democratic, like the teachers would ask us, er... "For this term, what do you want to do? Because we have to do these things, but in what order do you want to do them?" and have the class vote (20:335-341).
variety	12	Like different projects, not just sort of "Write it down on paper", or whatever (8:374-375).
breaks	11	You need a break, like, you couldn't have eight, or whatever, solid hours of school (8:63-65).
movement - active	6	If I could change the school, I'd make more outdoor activities in the summer (6:464-465).
some freedom of expression	6	....when they just sit and make you do your work, you can't move, you can't talk, you can't do anything (13:44-47).
student input	5	A teacher of mine, in geography, what she did, she made us teach a class for a project (10:258-259).
<u>Socio-educational Category</u>		
discussions	20	When we are having a class discussion....cause I find I learn more from that because I see everybody's viewpoint (17:275-279).
groupwork, centres	10	I like it when we get to work in groups and stuff, and I only like it if we have a good group. Because some people don't like to work and I don't like that (6:262-266).  If you're doing it by yourself, it's not as interesting, cause, like, you're sitting there and it's a really boring thing, right? But then, if it's a group project, you get more out of it, if everybody does their share (7:216-220).
participation	4	[In the perfect class] I think everybody is participating (13:217).

table continues

Table 5 (continued)

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Interview Sample</u>
<u>Experiential Category</u>		
projects	12	I think they are really good for your learning. You learn a lot about a subject when you do projects (23:316-317).
hands on	11	Because I like fiddling around with chemicals and different stuff (24:199-200).
games	10	Take, for instance, the French teacher, he plays a baseball kind of game.....that just adds a little more fun to it (2:12-15).
field trips	9	You learn easier when you're there, instead of, like, write, seeing it on the board, then writing it down on a piece of paper (12:455-457).
visual	9	I mean, when I'm in history, it's easier when she shows things in front of the class, you know, pictures or maps or something of where they went (19:217-200).
<u>Workload Category</u>		
balance - work/ play	23	I don't think you have to work, like, every minute of the period (12:567).
less writing and notemaking	20	[In the ideal class] they wouldn't just give us questions. Cause when you do questions, you don't learn from it (21:378-380).
on level of ability	15	I think we should be able to learn in groups.....with the groups of your ability (15:44-47).
balanced workload - easy/hard	9	Well, not too hard and not too easy (17:375-376).
less repetition	4	You already know these things and they bring it up again, and you think I already know it, I don't want to go through it again (4:371-374).

Twenty-three pairs of students discussed the importance of the various subjects they were taught. There were many differences between students as to what subjects were more relevant and/or more interesting. English and mathematics were generally considered to be most important for their future career or life. History and geography were debated; some thought these subjects were useless while others thought it was good to know where they came from or a little about their world. Science was enjoyable and "not boring" if the students were allowed to "do" interesting things such as experiments. These subjects, along with French, were considered to be the basic ones. Drama was valued very highly by most students because it allows a certain amount of freedom and self-expression. Drama provides many opportunities to develop self-confidence. "Because it's not like going to fail you or pass you at all, but I guess it makes you a kind of better person, like more outgoing, more outspoken" (21:251-254). Most students loved physical education although there were certain aspects which individual students disliked. Students seemed to enjoy any activities that involved physical movement. "...like physical education, because, like, you are active; you are having fun, at the same time, you are learning also. You are learning skills" (14:157-161).

The electives were also highly valued. They were a change of pace, a less pressured situation, where the students could "make" something, socialize a little and also move around. The electives are "a break from the normal boring stuff" (20:50). Also students could choose their electives, in School B. Subjects such as family

studies and industrial arts were enjoyable, again if the students were allowed to do "hands on" activities rather than listen to lectures or do only theory. Those who took either instrumental or vocal music really enjoyed it. "It makes the day go quicker and funner" (19:255-256). Extra-curricular activities were something to look forward to after regular schoolwork. Clubs and sports were cited as being a lot of fun. "Because it sort of like makes you want to come to school" (24:34-35).

Learning should be fun. "It's when you're having a good time, you're learning more" (8:309-310). Fun was considered to be work, however, not "fooling around" or "wasting time". As noted in Table 5, twenty-one pairs of students stressed this repeatedly. "When I go into a classroom, I like to have fun but I also like to do a lot of work. But I can't really concentrate when I am always serious" (12:21-25). Seventeen expressed a wish that the learning environment should not be "boring". Work that is challenging or that requires one to discover or find out was considered fun. However, "If it's too hard you get discouraged. I think it should be fairly challenging" (9:320-321). Related to the difficulty of work is the make-up of classes. Sixteen pairs thought that students should be grouped according to ability levels. It is "so boring" when the teacher has to go "super slow" that "they're [quicker students] not going to listen any more" (10:500-504). Yet, groupwork was highly valued for many reasons, one of which was "if you have someone who is, say, is really lower than you, you can help them along or a little higher, they can help you" (15:49-51). School work should be interesting. Subjects are

interesting if they have a real-life application or are useful. Interest may depend upon the individual's preference for a subject or it may depend upon how the teacher presents it. "Fun" and "boring" are commonly used terms. They will be discussed further under the topic of "Relevance".

Student control and freedom in the learning environment was discussed. Thirteen pairs of students appreciated having choices within a class, or in the elective program. Students are more interested in a topic that they are allowed to choose. "That's pretty neat" (11:599). Also, a variety of learning activities and teaching styles was perceived as important by twelve pairs of students. A change from the regular routine was fun. "You have to have a change as well. Like, if your teacher always does things in the same way every lesson, it gets really boring" (7:95-98). Students said that they like breaks during the day, a few minutes to be alone, to chat with their friends or to relax. Perhaps "one period a day for silent reading" (19:326). Lunch was considered an important break. Intermediate students do not have a recess, but when they move from class to class they have an opportunity to chat with their classmates.

Class discussions were perceived as an important component of the learning scene by twenty pairs of students. Interaction with the teacher was seen as a useful means of integrating knowledge. "When we give and take, when we socialize with the teacher, like when the teacher starts asking you what you think of this.....then I get interested" (11:505-510). Also, sharing ideas with fellow

classmates was perceived as important: "I think you learn more, like, when you actually talk about it in class than you do if you just copy notes off the board" (9:248-250). Students get to know about each other as well as the subject of the lesson. But discussion should be in moderation: "I find that to be one of her [teacher] faults: there's always too much talking (3:320-322). Also, students really like to work in groups. However, the compatibility of the group is most important. Students do not like to be compelled to work with students whom they do not like or who do not contribute their fair share.

Projects were a favoured form of learning activity, especially when students could work in pairs or groups of their choice. Projects require students to show initiative and independence, to research and plan. "Well, yeh, projects are good: I like to do projects" (15:259-260). Games and quizzes were much enjoyed as well as hands-on work. Experiments in science are fun: "You see different things happening that you never thought of" (19:172-173). Field trips were considered to be good learning experiences. Visual aids, such as pictures, movies, objects added a new dimension to a lesson and provided interest.

Twenty-three of the twenty-five pairs suggested that there should be a balanced workload. A mixture of "fun" and "play" was perceived to be very important. "I think teachers should mix education and fun in" (16:30-31). Fun can be a vehicle to learning, however: "Like having entertainment and work, and using the entertainment to show them what they are doing. Like, to show

them, to give examples" (16:384-387). Students wished that the workload could be more evenly spread. Various teachers tend to give projects all at one time of year. Tests seem to come together. "One day I had five tests; it was hard to study.....they should spread it out more" (1:292-296). There should also be a balance in the difficulty of the work. This issue was discussed previously in regard to challenge and to grouping students according to ability. The difficulty level of the lesson should be balanced so that it is not too easy but "if you have something too hard, I find that really frustrating" (13:320-321). It was felt by twenty pairs of students that there was too much emphasis on writing activities. Other activities, such as dramatizations or debates "would just sort of be a change from writing down work, handing it in" (3:369-370). Writing exercises seem to be centred around answering questions, either from a textbook or from the blackboard. It must again be stressed that writing per se was not bad. The students felt that a mixture of oral and written work is best. Hands-on activities, discussions, projects and groupwork are much appreciated but not all the time. Students like to work alone, at times, and do written exercises or read silently. This theme is expressed consistently throughout the interviews.

### Homework

Although homework could not be classed as a major issue, as noted in Table 6, there were considerable differences regarding the need for homework. Of those students who mentioned homework, nine students said they agreed with homework and two were

Table 6

Perceived Characteristics for Homework, Physical School Environment and Parents for Pairs of Grade 7 and 8 Students

Characteristic	Frequency	Sample Interviews
<u>Homework</u>		
<u>Amount Category</u>		
moderate	12	I think there shouldn't be, like, homework for everything every night. Like just three subjects, maybe, a night for fifteen or twenty minutes [each] (23:312-314).
evenly spread	4	.....because some nights, I have nothing to do.....and one night I get home, and I'm continually working until 11:30p.m. (20:459-464).
<u>Attitude Category</u>		
agree	9	I think that, my view is it is intruding on my time (18:427-428).  I think it should be based on if you get it finished you don't have homework. But if you don't get it finished, then you do it for homework (11: 652-655).
to be completed	8	I agree with it; I just don't like it! (18:454-456).
helpful	3	Well, you have to get everything done. (18:457). .....because the teacher is doing it for you on the board and stuff, so you have to be able to do it yourself, so doing homework... (19:467-469).
disagree	2	Well, I don't know, if you have homework, you kind of don't learn that much (10:471-472).
<u>Physical Environment</u>		
<u>Facilities Category</u>		
various facilities	7	The facilities and stuff like that need beefing up; the shop rooms, like, quadruple the size (20:280283).
windows	7	But if the windows are open and it's all airy and the teacher's in a good mood, it's funner to work (16:324-326).

table continues

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Sample Interview</u>
<u>Comfort</u>		
<u>Category</u>		
temperature controlled	5	I think there should be air-conditioning. Definitely. You can't think if there is sweat running down you (24:357-359).
fresh air	5	Our windows, they lift up but they don't let the wind in (24:373-375).
softer chairs	5	And if you're just sitting there for eighty minutes, it really gets very uncomfortable (4:475-476).
desks to fit	3	No. You go to sit down and you see how short it [chair] is...and you sort of, bang, you hit the bottom (23:258-260).
<u>Appearance</u>		
<u>Category</u>		
bright	4	I'd make it bright; I like bright classrooms (6:499-500).
moderately clean	3	It should be clean, but not too clean.....Well, it shouldn't be like a hospital or anything (15:68).
colorful	3	I'd say a bit loud colours, like, because you can't come into another white classroom, like, it doesn't bring out your heart into it (14:528-530).
<u>Parents</u>		
<u>Intervention</u>		
<u>Category</u>		
helpful	4	Sometimes you have problems with the work; it's good to have parents that support you (23:40-41).
encouraging	3	Like, I'm <u>encouraged</u> to succeed at my house (3:90-91).
moderate control	3	They are the ones who have to make you, ...kind of push you to do things.....because they know it's important*(17:60-69).

definitely opposed. "You should have homework.....because the teacher is doing it for you on the board and stuff, so you have to be able to do it yourself, so having homework..." (19:261-269). The majority perceived it as a necessary evil, to be used more as a practice session for students who were having difficulty, an extension for those who did not get time to finish in class, or an application to a lesson taught in class. "I agree with it; I just dislike it" (18:455-456). Twelve pairs of students expressed that homework should be moderate, about thirty minutes to one hour. A few students did more than that at times. It seemed to be given quite unevenly between the various teachers. Students said they would have no homework for several nights and then it would be "piled on" one night. "Like, I don't know if they plan it or not..... and then you get every subject, tons of work! And that just drives kids nutty. Like... I find myself nearly crying because I have all these projects to do" (16:431-439). Tests seemed to come all at once as well as projects. Nonetheless, it was felt that assigned homework should be finished by all students. "You make sure that it's done" (10:395).

### Physical Environment

The physical class and school environment was a minor issue. Table 6 illustrates the characteristics which were mentioned. A few students expressed a desire for better facilities, such as a swimming pool, larger classrooms, water fountains that work, etc. The main concern was the need for big windows that not only provided good light but good ventilation. The lack of fresh air

seems to be a common problem. "You're cooped up in a classroom that has no air-conditioning and when the windows are open, it doesn't matter [no air]" (6:467-469). It should be noted that the interviews were conducted during May and June, during which one week was extremely hot. "I think there should be a lot of natural light, like if they try to get as many windows as possible in the school" (25:547-549). Also, hard chairs or chairs that are the wrong size were complained about. "I can't go into a classroom and find a desk that's my size" (11:733-734). On the whole, the physical environment was pleasing, particularly in regard to cleanliness.

### Parents

Few students mentioned the role of parents in their schooling. Perhaps this was because the interviewer's questions addressed their schooling experience, which was interpreted by most as what happens in school. Those characteristics mentioned appear in Table 6. Parents should exert moderate control. Parents who are encouraging are appreciated: "Like I'm encouraged to succeed at my house" (3:90-91). And parents who can offer some help, check over work or help to ask questions before a test are perceived positively by some students; others did not wish them to intervene.

### Perfect School

When asked to describe the "perfect class", many students said that they would not favour such a thing. A few bad things are needed to create a little interest, to provide something to talk about, or to complain about! Several said that perfection was impossible and totally unrealistic. "I wouldn't want it to be perfect. Like, not everything can be perfect. And cause I don't think it would work. I think imagining anything perfect is stupid because you can't...nothing is perfect" (7:300-304). "I sort of think I wouldn't like to be in that situation because if everything is to be perfect, well if you don't have any problems, how are you supposed to learn what it's going to be like? I mean life is not going to be perfect all the time" (25:405-410). Whenever the students interpreted "perfect" in this way, the interviewer then rephrased the question to describe the "ideal" class. This word elicited more reactions and suggestions for improvement.

### School Rating

Students were asked to rate their present schooling experience as excellent, good, average, fair, or poor. These results may be seen in Table 7. Some students chose an in-between position, which points to a need for a fuller range of choices for the question. This fact reinforces one of the criticisms of surveys, mentioned earlier in the study. The average per cent ratings by the students from both schools were as follows:

excellent - 17%; good - 56%; average - 24%; fair - 1%; poor - 2%. The results from the two schools are very consistent, a fact which perhaps allows some confidence in the interpretation of the findings. Generally, students seem to evaluate their school quite highly, over half of the interviewed students rating it as good and about a quarter as average.

#### Improvement Needed

When asked how much improvement would be needed to change their school into an ideal school, students responded as follows: a lot - 6%; medium - 39%; small - 43%; none - 0%; no answer - 12%. These results are average percent ratings by the students from both schools and are noted in Table 7. In School A, one pair said they could not say how much improvement would be needed; the interviewer omitted to ask the question to two pairs, hence the 25% rating under "no answer". Again, the results are quite consistent between the two schools.

These results seem to indicate that students in both School A and B are relatively satisfied with their present schooling. Nevertheless, a considerable proportion of students, about 40% in each school, perceived that a medium amount of improvement would be in order.

Although the majority of students rated their present schooling experience as good, many students said that it would require a medium amount of improvement, not a small amount as might be expected, to convert it to an ideal situation. The choice

Table 7

Perceived School Rating and Improvement Required by Individual  
Grade 7 and 8 Students

School Rating by Percent

	Excellent	Good	Average	Fair	Poor
School A	17	54	25	0	4
School B	17	58	23	2	0
Average	17	56	24	1	2

Improvement Required by Percent

	A lot	Medium	Small	None	No answer
School A	8	40	27	0	25
School B	4	38	58	0	0
Average	6	39	43	0	12

of words may have caused this somewhat contradictory response. For future research, it is suggested that a scale of ten be used instead of words, to assess both the amount of improvement needed and the school rating.

Students were asked what their friends and classmates would consider to be most important in their schooling. The purpose of such a question was to allow students, who might have been reticent to give their personal view, an opportunity to distance themselves from the question. Many students perceived the "other" students as choosing friends to be the most important factor in their schooling, even though they, themselves, might have chosen another factor. An interesting variation of this response was: "Well, some of them would say friends and some other, ones like the intelligent ones, sometimes it's usually the intelligent ones who say teachers and subjects" (22:86-89). Students frequently saw their classmates as being too social: "It's like a lot of my friends are very social...not doing so well" (7:119-120). Yet, they seldom saw themselves as being too social or not working too hard. When asked how the other students would rate their present schooling they replied that it would probably be the same as the way they had rated it or that it was impossible to comment upon what the other students thought.

## Relevance

The students' concept of relevance emerged clearly throughout the analysis of the protocols. Students' perceived relevance has two dimensions: practical and personal. Practical relevance is externally imposed upon the student by teachers, parents, or society. Personal relevance, on the other hand, comes from within the student: to learn for its inherent value. A list of the characteristics which students generated for "personal" and "practical" relevance may be seen in Table 8, accompanied with interview samples. The protocols were re-analysed from this new perspective. The students' perceptions of the relevance of their schooling will now be discussed.

### Practical Relevance

As noted in Table 8, twenty pairs felt that school is important because it helps one prepare for a career. School helps to prepare you for the future or for life. "Right now, what I'm thinking about is university and having a job, because I don't want to just live on the streets" (4:67-70). Many thought that it was important to do well in school for marks, such as tests or exams. "You need some kind of marks, or high marks to get into a higher level of learning next year" (3:22-24). One reason that the electives are so popular is that "you are not trying to impress anybody for marks; it's only, like, an elective " (21:243-245). School should teach skills that are useful or practical, that can be applied in real life. There was a definite perception of what

Table 8

Characteristics of Perceived School Relevance for Pairs of Grade 7 and 8 Students and Interview Samples

Characteristic	Frequency	Interview Sample
<u>Personal Category</u>		
learning - education	22	As long as I find that I'm learning and enjoying it (4:411-412).
like - dislike	19	I like to come to school (24:155).
interesting, exciting	16	If you do something exciting, it'll catch the student's eye, like make it better (10:260-262).  When you are really bored, things that are pounded into your head you don't get (18:297-299).
enjoyable, feels good	14	.....and I enjoy classes [drama] very much (13:246).
desire to learn	12	I guess it would be just for your knowledge. Would you like to know it? (13:299-300).
fun	12	.....and make learning more fun and easier to learn and keep inside (2:5-7).
new ideas	11	[In a good class] they concentrate more on creativity instead of just facts (20:53-54).
understand	10	They would still be working but have a discussion about the thing so they would understand it better (22:261-263).
challenge	10	When you have a challenge, cause then if you can beat the the challenge, and then you know that you can do some more and then you know you're really learning something (4:418-421).
remember	9	And if he [teacher] teaches it in a fun way.....I think the students will remember it more (11:19-21).
need-to-know	9	We should know where we came from and why things are today, why Canada is Canada (24:13-15).
better person	5	.....and it builds up your self- confidence, like I said (21:47).
get along and/or work with others	3	You're doing it with your friends... sometimes you can learn more about your friends and the subject you're doing it with (7:212-214).

table continues

Table 8 (continued)

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Interview Sample</u>
<u>Practical Category</u>		
career	20	.....so that you can, like, get like a job and stuff like that. Like that you can make a good living (12:6-8).
future	18	What I think is you need a good education to live...in life, or you're not going to do very well (6:41-42).
marks - tests, exams	17	As long as, like, I pass and, you know, I get good marks (10:94-95).
real-life application, useful, practical	16	It's more interesting when you're applying it to something you're actually going to do (7:45-47).
important	12	Some things are important, not all of them, like some things are not important at all (8:10-11).
life	12	.....like learning the basics, like math, language, er...the things you are going to use in the outer world (16:8-11).
high school	7	The dates and stuff you need to get into university and make it through high school (2:402-403).
pass	7	.....because it's [drama] not like going to fail you or pass you at all (21:251-252).
university	5	You need your education to get degrees in university or college (2:104-105).
success	4	.....like, be a success when you get out (16:21).

subjects or skills were "important" or "basic". "French, math and science, like those things you need in life, like you can't live without them" (6:33-35). "Basic learning, like until you get out to the big world, basic learning, like you really have to get that down pat" (16:108-111). But, when a student talked about learning the subjective completion in grammar, he could see no relevance in having to learn that: "like I'm having trouble with them. I don't really want to know, really, because it won't help me in the world, will it?" ((18:102-104). Sometimes the students' perceptions seem a little confusing to the analyst. "Subjects, they're important for stuff like your brain but they're not important at all for fun.....because projects are, like, fair; you need them but they're not important" (8:219-225). But the student knows exactly what he means: some things are important for practical relevance but are perceived to lack personal relevance, or vice versa: "Just like some things, like it's kinda neat-to-know but you really don't have to use it, ever" (12:327-328).

### Personal Relevance

Comments like "neat-to-know" refer to the students' perceptions of personal relevance. This dimension of relevance is more elusive than the more tangible practical dimension. Nonetheless, it is equally stressed in its various forms. To find out things one has never known before, to find out more about oneself, and what relates to oneself is personally relevant to the child. "We should know where we came from and why things are

today; why Canada is Canada" (24:13-15). But in reply was "Yeh, but why should we learn about France? We don't live in France." And the answer was: "Because that is a big part of our culture.....and it wouldn't be like that without France" (24:13-21). Most important is the need to get a "good education" or to "learn". "It's just important that you get a lot of experience in different things" (25:81-82).

Students expressed their feelings about different aspects of their schooling with words such as "like" or "dislike". "I like this school and all the other schools I've been to" (5:151-153). "Most of the kids I know they don't like school that much. They just find it a pretty big drag" (18:198-200). "They are just trying to be like everybody else...they probably really like it" (19:111-112). One can see that it sometimes becomes very difficult to ascertain what students really perceive! By probing further with questions, one can usually unravel their thinking processes.

Words such as "fun" and "interesting" and "exciting" are frequently used. "Like with history, you find, I find it interesting because to learn about the past, like how man did this and that before us" (14:327-329). In French, where the students are doing skits, "that's fun...we get fun and learning at the same time" (1:211-212). Interest may come from within, however; "I think it's just something that comes naturally. If you have a certain interest to it, it will seem more exciting to you" (13:52-54). When a student finds the work interesting, he perceives the experience to be enjoyable: "... but I still enjoyed

it, and that's when I find I'm learning a lot in books" (18:325-327). Learning about "new ideas" was deemed a positive experience, as well as a "challenge". "My idea of fun is like when the lesson is really creative and interesting and you enjoy what they are saying and you soak it all in" (20:78-81). If the learning environment is "enjoyable", it is personally relevant. One "understands" and "remembers" what is relevant. For example, movies: "the kids, like, I think they get more into it and it pretty well makes them want to listen because they enjoy it. And it makes it easier for them and easier for them to learn" (16:138-142).

Although the term "relevance" is never used by the students, their perceptions of the relevance of their schooling experience is described through the use of many terms, as seen in Table 8. Having a good education, a firm base of knowledge, is very important for students. They are acutely aware that they have to prepare themselves for the future, for a career and for living in today's world. At the same time, they would like to learn for the fun of it, for the personal satisfaction of finding out about their environment or of overcoming a challenge. Personal relevance is probably more difficult for the students to describe than practical relevance because it tends to be more abstract, personal and subjective. It appears that most students, however, expressed their perceptions very clearly.

### Interrelationships of Students' Perceptions

As discussed earlier, the interview technique was chosen for this research because it best addressed the objective of the project, i.e. to study students' perceptions of the relevance of their schooling. Once the categories and their characteristics were described and analysed, the students' perceptions emerged. It became apparent that relevance pertained to various characteristics which were interrelated. The protocols were re-analysed from this different perspective which revealed several "connections" between the major categories described above: classmates, teachers, and learning environment. Table 9 shows the predominant relationships. A description follows.

The major theme expressed was "So if I'm not enjoying it, sometimes I just don't take it in. If you're having a good time, you're learning more" (8:307-310). Fun and learning are definitely connected. "I mean school without fun.....pretty boring" (19:51-52). Attention is given when the work is interesting. "The work should be interesting. If you are doing learning boring work, you won't really pay attention" (15:103-105). "Well, I would say, most of the classes you do have fun and you learn. But some of the classes, you sit down and you write a note and the teacher will talk and then you leave" (3:307-312).

There is a connection between understanding a subject and liking that subject. If you understand a subject, then you will probably like that subject. Conversely, if you do not understand,

Table 9

Interrelationships of Students' Perceived Relevance  
for Pairs of Grade 7 and 8 Students

Category	Item	Frequency
Learning Environment	You learn more when you have fun.	17
	You learn more if you are challenged.	11
	You work hard if you are interested.	6
Teacher	You learn more from a fun teacher.	11
	You learn more if you like the teacher.	10
	You learn a lot from good teachers.	7
	You will work hard if you like the teacher.	6
	You cannot learn if the teacher lacks control of class.	4
Classmates	Friends make school fun.	15
	You learn more when you can discuss.	12
	Students who misbehave prevent others from learning.	12
	Friends help you learn.	10
	You enjoy school when you can interact.	7

you will find the subject boring and uninteresting. "I don't understand French and that's my most boring class of all time and I can't understand it at all. So that's probably why you like it, when you understand things" (17:254-259). If you can choose a topic that interests you, "you'll work harder at it because you're interested in it" (1:249).

Another major theme was that friends help to make school fun. "I see my friends. I think it's fun. It's not that bad" (19:106-108). Students want to come to school to see their friends; that is where most children meet their friends. Friends can help when you are having trouble with the work. "Sometimes I feel if it's a stupid question to ask the teacher, I feel embarrassed to ask. But with your friends, I don't really mind you asking it to them" (17:91-95). Friends should not get in the way of one's learning, however; "Sometimes, like, good friends, you just get too much with them and then it interferes" (16:112-114). If one does not have any school friends, school can be a lonely place.

Another connection is between liking the teacher and liking the subject and doing well in it. "If you have a really mean, grumpy teacher.....the students are going to hate that subject and call it the death room.....but if you have a fun teacher who is willing to listen and who understands you, then they'll enjoy it more" (14:175-184). If a teacher is too strict, "someone who just wants you to work, work, work, all the time.....and you won't, you'll, like, go against them for doing that" (12:215-219).

Proficient teachers have an effect upon learning. "If the teachers are good, then you'll learn a lot" (1:193). "Because of our teacher, it's like, we don't learn anything" (10:324-325). If a teacher can explain the lesson well, the students will understand: "Some teachers have a tendency to say "Here it is", give a mild explanation and it's not enough" (3:471-473). If the teacher has no control there is little or no learning: "No one listens to him..... I mean, he definitely has to crack down.....we don't learn anything in his class" (3:495-501). Appropriate punishment is more effective: "The teachers aren't here to inflict like tons of punishment, eh? I mean a reasonable amount .....like four detentions for missing your homework is, like, ludicrous" (20:488-495). "You should have some sort of system to control that" (20:496-497).

What is the right combination for success in school? "Well, I think most of my friends [would say] if they have good friends and are learning a lot and their grades are high, they will say that the school is good" (25:190-194). As for the teacher, it is: "A person who has the amount of discipline it takes to keep the kids in line but also has enough laughs, like humour, a good enough humour to make the kids have fun in their learning. And does activities that are fun and doesn't just give notes and homework and stuff like that" (2:325-332).

Throughout the interviews students consistently expressed the idea of a balance. In fact, the schooling process seems to be one large balancing act! There should be a balance between work and

play in the classroom. "Well, this teacher, her class isn't very fun, you know. You just sit there and it's all work" (16:49-50). But "not all fun and games" (16:383). Homework should be given in moderation. There should be a balance between writing and discussion, working alone or in a group. The work should be hard but not too hard. "If it's not a challenge, you won't learn anything" (13: 314-315). How much challenge? "Just enough" (13:332). But if the work is fun, you won't mind if it is hard: "Like a fun project, but, like, it's hard work and it's fun" (16:158-160). The teachers should be strict but not too strict, serious at times, but not all the time. "Yes, they should control them enough but not too strict" (21:496-497).

"Fun" seems to be the cornerstone in students' perceptions of their schooling. "Fun" is doing your work in a variety of interesting ways. "Fun" is "educational" (12:401). A student's concept of fun pertains to all major areas in his/her school life. The learning environment should be fun; that is when you learn best. Teachers who are fun, who have a sense of humour and who plan fun lessons, are considered to be good teachers. Fellow classmates and friends make school fun, through informal relationships and through class discussions and group projects. Without these elements of fun, school is usually "boring" for most students. School is personally relevant when it can be considered fun. "If it's not taught to you in a fun way, it doesn't stick in your head" (11:53-54).

## CHAPTER FOUR

## INTERPRETATION

A direct, exploratory approach to the question of what students perceive to be relevant in their schooling was followed. The methodology, utilizing in-depth interviews and subsequent analysis, was selected as the best means to elicit such information. Throughout the research, emphasis was placed upon eliciting an explanation of students' perceptions. Certainly, the students provided a wealth of information; open-ended questions proved effective in allowing the students to express their perceptions of their schooling.

Through mental models, the student forms representations of his schooling environment. These models are constructed from past and present experience. Whenever there is a shift in the schooling environment, due to formal instruction or experience, the model is revised to incorporate the change. Thus, the mental model evolves and continues to evolve throughout the student's school career. Through use of the model, the student organizes his perceptions of his world. In turn, the altered mental model causes the student to view and react to his environment in a somewhat different manner. This interactionist process is captured by means of the interview technique. Throughout the interviews, the students discussed those elements which they considered to be most important to them and,

prompted by questions, why they held these particular views. Abstract concepts were externalized, through the use of verbal protocols, in a manner that was understandable, organized and relatively simplified.

One can readily see from the results that the students see the environment as a key factor in the learning process. The social environment is of particular importance; teachers and classmates rank highly as two of the three most important factors as perceived by students. The behaviour and attitude of fellow students is ranked as one of the top three factors by forty out of fifty students. Similarly, the personal and professional attributes of the teacher are ranked as one of the top three factors by forty-four of the fifty students. The learning environment, which incorporates the types of activities in the classroom, is ranked by forty-two of the students as one of the three most important factors in their learning.

The classroom and school environment is a most complex one. How the student perceives events or his place in these environments provides the content of the interviews. The interview technique allowed students to discuss their perceptions at length, in a semi-structured manner which permitted flexibility and individuality. Paired interviews encouraged thinking and extended dialogue. The results of the study will now be interpreted in the light of Vygotsky's theorizing.

The impact of schooling upon a child's cognitive development was considered carefully by Vygotsky. In the preschool years, a

child learns concepts spontaneously through interaction with his social environment in the process of everyday living. When he/she enters school, however, concepts are presented in a formal manner. These new scientific concepts are intertwined with the already existing concepts to form a new and different structure.

Learning precedes development, he maintained; this sequence results in what Vygotsky termed "the zone of proximal development". Meaningful learning, then, must be aimed at the student's potential developmental level. In terms of the present study, students expressed their need to be suitably challenged. A challenge allows the child to strive to reach his potential level. Work that is unchallenging, dull and repetitious is considered to be "boring". On the other hand, work that is too difficult frustrates the student and causes him/her to "tune out" or give up. Tailored challenges motivate the student to work harder and to perceive the work as "fun". Students expressed their enjoyment of learning new ideas and discovery-type activities, such as science experiments. They particularly liked projects where they were not "told" the information but they had to find out for themselves. A desire for less copious note-making, endless drills and teacher lecturing illustrates the student's need to explore. To be challenged by learning which is aimed at the student's potential level rather than the actual level is what makes learning relevant in the purest sense.

Students expressed some very definite ideas about what subjects are important, particularly in terms of practical

relevance. Math, English and French are generally considered to be very important because they are life skills, as well as necessary for most careers. Subjects like history and geography are considered to be less important because they have less practical relevance, and yet, important for some students who perceive that they have personal relevance. On the other hand, drama is enjoyed by most students even though it has little perceived practical relevance; it has personal relevance for the student in that it is "fun" and helps to develop self-confidence.

Interestingly, some students were able to view subjects as an exposure to various fields and to appreciate different forms of expression while others clearly could not see their value. Vygotsky stated:

The psychological prerequisites for instruction in school subjects are to a large extent the same; instruction in a given subject influences the development of higher functions far beyond the confines of that particular subject; the main psychic functions in studying various subjects are inter-dependent - their common bases are consciousness and deliberate mastery, the principal contributions of the school years. It follows from these findings that all the basic school subjects act as formal discipline, each facilitating the learning of others; the psychological function stimulated by them develop in one complex process.

(Vygotsky, 1986, p.186)

Although the student may not appreciate the value of such formal discipline, he/she will gradually develop consciousness and mastery of previously purely mechanical skills and habits. Therefore, even though the student may not perceive any reason or desire to learn a particular subject, the experience, according to Vygotsky, will stimulate the student's zone of proximal development. From the student's point of view, however, such formal discipline may seem to lack relevance, in both a practical and personal sense. As the students pointed out, boredom with a subject may not be an expression of dislike of content but more a dislike of the approach. (Zuga, 1983, p.17)

Vygotsky stressed that learning is a social phenomenon. The role of fellow classmates and teachers, i.e. the social process in learning, is of primary importance in the development of complex mental processes; lack of recognition of this process by educators limits the intellectual development of many students (Vygotsky, 1978, p.126). This idea was clearly conveyed throughout the interviews. Many students perceive their school friends and associates to be very important. In fact, referral to friends was the only item which was mentioned by every pair of students. School is seen as a place where one meets friends and interacts with others. Friends and classmates help each other, both individually, and through class or group discussions. They can also provide a challenge through such interaction by presenting new or more advanced ideas to others.

Characteristics of classmates influence both social interaction and learning. Students realize the benefits they derive from capable peers and, conversely, from less capable peers, particularly those who misbehave and spoil the learning environment. Also, students who are low in ability create problems in that the teacher may not be able to tailor challenges appropriately to all students in the class. Hence, some students may find the work boring because it is too easy or repetitious while others may be frustrated by work that is beyond them. Students felt that grouping students according to ability level would help to alleviate the problem. Large classes also compound the problem, where the teacher is often forced to teach to the middle ability range, thereby unavoidably disregarding students at either end of the spectrum. Classes of about twenty students were perceived to be optimal because there would be enough students to provide diversity and yet not too many for the teacher to control and to give individual attention when needed.

The role of language is a central tenet of Vygotsky. Language, developed over time, helps to shape the behaviour and development of society and the individual. Through language, culture is transmitted. Specifically, language requires the student to adapt, restructure, interact, integrate and internalize. Learning activities, such as discussions, debates, paired and group work, provide the students with an opportunity to socialize and, at the same time, to integrate knowledge. They perceive such opportunities as enjoyable and educational. Also, when the teacher interacts with the students, rather than presents

knowledge strictly through lecturing and written application, the students feel they learn more and, at the same time, have more "fun".

Vygotsky views the teacher's role to be of major importance. Through capable adult guidance, the student may work to his potential level of development. The students also perceive the teacher to be of prime importance in their schooling. The teacher's personal and professional characteristics have been fully described by the students. A teacher's proficiency and ability to communicate effectively directly affect his/her ability to guide the student to expand his/her "zone of proximal development". A teacher's personal characteristics are perceived to be equally important. Since learning is a social phenomenon, it follows that the social relationship between the teacher and student plays a major part in the learning process. Students expressed that they are more likely to work harder for a teacher whom they like, and, in so doing, are likely to learn more.

For Vygotsky, play is a leading factor in child development. As in learning, "but in a wider background for changes in needs and consciousness", play brings about internal transformations and "creates a zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 102). Students, although not using the term "play" in the intermediate school setting, expressed a desire for activities such as quizzes, games and projects. Physical education, where formal games are played, was perceived to be a most enjoyable subject by most

students. Students were also most enthusiastic when they discussed role-playing activities, such as those performed in drama.

The results of the study were compatible with Vygotsky's theorizing. Use of the mental model theory was most successful in that Vygotsky's theoretical framework was clearly operationalized. Through language students are able to express their perceptions of their schooling experience, which is based upon past and present experience. The students' perspicacity was impressive as well as their ability to express their feelings. They addressed the task with sincerity and confidence. Educators might seriously consider viewing students' perceptions of school relevance as a component of their professional intervention.

The present study was an integration of theory, methodology and content. Vygotsky's views on the schooling process provided a strong framework for a study on students' perceptions of their schooling. The mental model theory facilitated the methodology, more as a tool to assist in the research. Students were invited to externalize their perceptions in paired interviews through the use of verbal reports. From analysis of the data, a rich store of information was gleaned. Thus, the methodology led to results that were compatible with the theoretical framework. One may conclude that each played a constructive and essential part in this study.

## CHAPTER 5

## CONCLUSIONS

The study was successful in revealing students' perceptions of both their present schooling and the ideal or preferred one. Results showed definite patterns in student responses which illustrate a consensus by students of what is considered to be important. Perceived relevance emerged as a two-dimensional phenomenon: practical and personal. Interrelationships between the students perceptions were also gleaned from the interviews and have been described.

In light of the fact that there appears to be no similar research on the subject of school relevance, to any depth, from the student's perspective, one could conclude that further research of this nature is in order. Since protocol analysis is such a lengthy procedure, however, researchers may be reluctant to use this methodology. Yet, one can see that the protocols provide a rich description of the schooling experience from the student's perspective and certainly more in-depth results than those from surveys or questionnaires.

One could ask what value such information has? And, what use could be made of the results? Results from the study could be used to create future surveys which would assess students' views on the relevance of their schooling. Such surveys would be based upon ideas generated by the students and would utilize terminology

appropriate to their age. Without a better understanding of what students perceive to be relevant in their schooling, an adult researcher may not address the issues which are pertinent to students; the language used may be foreign to students and consequently risk bias to the results. A clearer understanding of students' perceptions would also result in the provision of a more appropriate range and selection of choices in the survey. This instrument could be used in other intermediate schools to assess the perceived relevance of the entire student body. Results from such a survey would be more meaningful because they would be based upon students' perceptions rather than upon those of the researcher, as in past instruments. Similar studies, utilizing the interview technique and protocol analysis, could be conducted at various grade levels. This type of assessment would utilize appropriate vocabulary for the specific grade level. Results would give better insights into the students' perceptions.

The researcher, in the past few months, has presented her findings to several groups of educators who expressed genuine interest and concurrence with the research results. Teachers seem open to discussing students' perceptions of their schooling and keen to become more aware of their views. Large class sizes, however, continue to stand in the way of teachers who want to incorporate more of the teaching and learning activities which students perceive to be most relevant.

An understanding of what it is that students perceive to be relevant in their schooling would be useful for teachers. Such an awareness might influence the teacher's intervention in the

classroom and school. A summary of the thesis results could be presented in a handbook for new or experienced teachers. The topic could be discussed in teacher education classes.

From the researcher's point of view, conducting the study was extremely interesting. Students have so much to say about their schooling. The researcher was pleased to be able to capture their ideas and feelings, which so often seem to be overlooked, ignored or paid lip service. In retrospect, if the researcher was to design such a study again, the same approach would be taken. Allowing the students to express themselves and listening to what the students have to say is vital to understanding their perceptions. Certainly, there would be minor changes such as the wording of questions and formulation of the coding grid, as mentioned previously, but the paired interview technique seems to be the best method to elicit information. The videotape was designed to trigger student responses and act as a model. However, its use appears to have been unnecessary, in retrospect. The researcher feels that the students experienced little difficulty in relating to the questions and would have been equally able to respond without viewing the video. For future studies, it is recommended that input from the researcher be kept as minimal as possible. Unfortunately, analysis of the interviews is extremely time-consuming and "boring", to quote the students, but the time invested seems proportionate to the value of the results. As Norman (1980) stated, research needs to permit a fairly broad scope in order to view the interaction of a wide range of related issues. Yet, it must be limited to a level that is manageable and

productive. It is felt that a balance between these two criteria has been kept in the present study.

Although there are many worthwhile books on learning theories available to educators which are written by experts in the field, it might be beneficial to consider the students' views on learning. Following are a few concluding comments addressed to educators which reflect the essence of what students perceive to be important in their schooling.

#### Implications for Educators

The student perceives the social environment in both the classroom and school as a vital factor in his schooling experience. A friendly climate where individuals show mutual respect and co-operation is a prerequisite for optimal learning. A positive, open and secure learning environment is of prime importance. To maintain such an environment might seem an impossible task but, nevertheless, is essential. The teacher is a powerful model who sets the tone and standard of behaviour in the classroom. Friends and classmates influence the learning experience a great deal; students adapt to their social environment and in turn help to shape that environment.

The dynamics of social interaction in a classroom can be ignored, can be opposed or can be utilized to the advantage of the members of the class. For example, if students feel that they learn more effectively through discussions and debate, through

working in groups or in pairs, as compared to listening to the teacher lecture or writing out endless answers to questions, it would seem logical to use the former mode of teaching to a considerable extent. If teachers cannot get students to stop talking, they might structure their lessons in a way which provide the students with an opportunity to use their verbal skills productively. Student presentations, projects or learning centres are examples of such lessons. Teachers do not need to be at the front of the class at all times. Neither do they need to be the centre of attention. Students usually welcome the chance to become more involved and to take a leadership role. The teacher's role becomes more of a planner, co-ordinator and overseer. Also, teachers who feel that they cannot keep up with marking student's work might consider student evaluation, self or peer, as an occasional alternative. Most students want to be actively involved in the learning process. However, students would be the first to caution against using such methodologies all the time. Individual work, listening and writing are worthy activities to be used in moderation. It must be stressed that a balance between the various modes of teaching and learning is perceived to be optimum.

Proficient teachers who know how to communicate effectively are considered by many students to be a prerequisite for effective learning. Teachers have to know how to teach in a way that holds the interest of the students. Teacher training programs must aim to improve the proficiency of teachers. Student teachers need more time in the classroom to learn from capable others and to practise their teaching skills. Also they need a broader exposure to the

various grades and subjects. For example, exemplary teachers could bring a class to the university to teach an actual lesson for a group of student teachers. Care must be taken, by employers, to select teachers who are not only proficient but warm, understanding individuals who genuinely like children. Personal characteristics of the teacher are as equally important as his/her professional attributes. A pleasant, understanding teacher can relate much more effectively than a cold, unfriendly one. Incompetent or hostile teachers should not be allowed to "turn off" students year after year.

Students want to know why they are learning a particular subject. If they understand the reason, they say that they are more likely to try harder. There cannot always be a practical application to a lesson, however. A brief explanation of the relevance of a topic would satisfy the student's need to know. Or, relating a more abstract subject to the student's immediate environment usually makes that subject relevant. Many students question that they must learn something solely to pass a test or exam or to be prepared for high school. They want to know why they really need to know. There must be a balance between teaching topics that are personally relevant and practically relevant. Students need to be prepared for their future life and career but they also need to learn for its intrinsic value. Of course, as students readily admitted, not all subjects interest all students. However, the teacher might consider aiming for what interests the majority of the class. Choice within a given topic is a practical way of responding to individual differences.

Students need a challenge. It is important that the teacher provide tailored challenges so that the student may expand his "zone of proximal development". Repetitive, dull tasks, including copious notemaking, are sure to "turn off" the majority of students. Thought-provoking questions, discussions, activities where the students can become directly involved, and problem solving, particularly related to the student's real life experiences, are more likely to capture the student's interest. The student must not be pushed beyond his potential capacity warn both Vygotsky and the students.

Class size is a most important factor in the study of students' perceived relevance. Most teachers will readily concur with most of the above suggestions and, in fact, many attempt to incorporate them in their daily lessons. It must be stressed, however, that the task is formidable when one is faced with classes of over thirty students. It is simply not feasible to provide tailored challenges to that many students, nor to conduct discussions where everyone is involved or to manage many large groups. Teachers become quite cynical when presented with novel teaching methods, learning theories which cannot be put into practice or ministry guidelines which are suitable for a class of twenty. Top priority must be given to lowering the class size to a more manageable level, at all grade levels. Many of the behavioral problems could be alleviated and teachers would be able to provide a more relevant schooling experience for the students. Creating sophisticated programs, such as gifted, enriched and remedial, to maintain students' interest or address their needs more

effectively, would be unnecessary if the regular classroom provided a richer learning environment. From the students' perspective, large classes impede the teacher from giving individual help. Students will "get the kind of help they need", in a smaller class (21:144). "The teacher just can't divide her attention up that big. So, like, twenty people, I'd say, would be maximum" (18:504-506). As well, the social dynamics of a large class become overwhelming for many students, especially at the intermediate school level. "There should be enough [students] to have good discussions but not too many, like. Only a few people are... get any attention" (9:347-349). "A smaller class is more personal because they have much more time for you" (24:387-388). With a smaller class "you get more attention from the teacher; you learn more" (24:416-417).

Clearly, the function of education is most complex. The roles of administrators, teachers, parents and students influence and interact with each other. Philosophies of education are constantly shifting to adapt to the changes in society; no sooner is one philosophy established than another is introduced. The point that often seems to be lost in this process is that schools are for the education of students. Therefore, it would appear, students' perceptions of the relevance of their schooling must be considered. If schools are to continue to prepare students for the world in which they live, which includes preventing students from "turning off" or dropping out, there must be a concerted attempt to provide a learning experience which is perceived as relevant by all students.

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Letter of Permission to Parents for Pilot Study

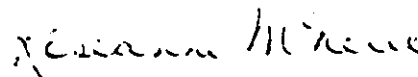
February 23, 1987.

Dear

I am conducting a study on the attitudes of children towards school. This is for a course that I am taking, in education, at the University of Ottawa. I would be most grateful if you would grant me permission to interview your child. Different situations will be presented and pairs of students will be asked to discuss these situations which will be non-personal and of a general nature. Strict anonymity will be guaranteed; no names will appear in my report nor could they be traced. I have secured Mr. Hanton's approval for this project. The interviews, about half an hour in duration, will be conducted at a convenient time for the student, either at noon or after school. They will not miss any classes.

I would be pleased to share the results with you if you so wish. Thank you for your co-operation.

Yours truly,



Roseanne McNeill  
Teacher-Librarian  
Meadowlands Middle School

RMcN/cr

-----

PLEASE SIGN UNDER THE APPROPRIATE STATEMENT

I grant permission for this interview -----

I do not grant permission for this interview -----

Scenarios for the Pilot Study

The music teacher is teaching a new song. Two girls in the class will not sing; they make no effort to participate. They giggle and make faces at each other. The teacher has moved them away from each other but this has not helped. Other students are beginning to be influenced by these girls.

We are studying mining in Australia. We have to do a project on this subject. Why do we have to study this stuff? Why do I need to know about mining in Australia? I think it's totally useless. I couldn't be less interested.....

What do you think about this problem?

What could be done to solve the problem?

When Mary forgot to do her homework two days in a row, her teacher sent home a homework note to her parents. Mary's parents signed the note as they were hurrying out to work the next morning. They made no comment to Mary except to grumble that they would be late for work. Steve also took a homework note home. His parents were quite upset that he had forgotten to do his homework. They talked to him about responsibility and made sure that the work was completed before signing the note. They also told him he couldn't go skating on Saturday, as planned.

What do you think about this?

## APPENDIX C

Table 1

## Frequency of Response by Group: Students' Characteristics

Characteristic	Group												Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
Respectful		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	11
Responsible	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X		X	9
Well-behaved				X		X	X		X	X	X	X	7
Friendly			X			X	X		X		X	X	6
Class Clown				X	X	X		X		X			5
Attentive			X			X	X	X					4
Moderate Range					X	X				X	X		4

Note: An X denotes at least one response.

Table 2

## Frequency of Responses by Group: Teachers' Characteristics

Characteristic	Group												Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
Communicates well	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Moderate disciplinarian	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Authoritarian fig.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		11
Flexible, some free	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		10
Friendly		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		9
Sense of Humour				X	X	X	X	X				X	6
Understanding		X	X	X	X		X			X		X	7
Helpful			X	X	X	X		X		X	X		7
Fair		X	X	X		X	X			X			6
Punishes minimally		X			X			X	X	X		X	6
Respectful		X			X	X				X	X		5
Patient		X				X				X			3
Calm, relaxed			X					X			X		3
Organized										X	X	X	3

Note: An X denotes at least one response.

## Frequency of Responses: Learning Environment

Characteristic	Group												Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
Interesting	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Work-oriented	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	11
Challenge	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	11
Fun, enjoyable	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	10
Student input		X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	9
Freedom of choice		X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	9
Active partic.		X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	9
Variety			X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	9
Social - discuss		X		X	X	X	X	X	X		X		8
Games, play, drama				X	X	X		X		X	X	X	7
- groups						X	X	X	X		X		5
Less lecturing				X		X			X	X	X		5
Films						X	X		X	X	X		5
Relaxing, not tense			X				X	X			X	X	5
Mod. competition			X		X		X					X	4
Less notemaking						X	X	X		X			4
Flexibility: order/ pace					X		X		X		X		4

Note: An X denotes at least one response

Table 4

## Frequency of Responses by Group: Homework

122

Characteristics	Group												Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
Completion	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	X	X	10
Moderate			X	X	X	X		X			X		6
Even workload			X	X	X	X	X				X		6

Table 5

## Frequency of Responses by Group: Physical Environment

Characteristics	Group												Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
Colorful						X	X			X		X	4
Pictures					X	X	X			X			4
Desks grouped							X		X			X	3
Organized										X	X	X	3
Class size (20)					X						X		2
Comfortable										X		X	2

Table 6

## Frequency of Responses by Group: Parents

Categories	Group												Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
Mod. surveillance		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	10
Shows interest	X	X				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	9
Communicates well	X	X		X		X	X		X	X	X		8

Note: An X denotes at least one response

Letter of Permission to Parents for Main Study

Dear Parent:

I am presently involved in a research project at the University of Ottawa, writing a thesis on what students perceive to be relevant in their schooling. I would be most grateful if you would allow me to interview your son/daughter regarding his views on this topic. The questioning will be non-personal and anonymity will be guaranteed. The interviews, with pairs of students, will take about about 40 minutes and will be conducted at noon hour or after school, if convenient, or during class time, in late May or early June.

Mr. Hanton and the Research and Development Department of the Carleton Board of Education have kindly granted their permission for me to request your co-operation in this project. Please show your approval by signing the permission slip below. Your child is under no obligation to participate, however. If you have any questions, please call me at 224-1448; I am the teacher-librarian at Meadowlands Middle School. I would be pleased to share the results with you if you are interested, probably late in the fall.

Sincere thanks for your consideration.

Yours truly,

(Mrs) Rosanne McNeill

-----  
Please sign below and ask your child to give the form to Mrs. McNeill

I grant permission for \_\_\_\_\_  
to be interviewed.

Parent's signature \_\_\_\_\_

If you would like a copy of the results of the study, please give your name and address, below.

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## APPENDIX E

Video Protocol

This afternoon, we are going to be talking about your ideas about education and I would like to hear some people's opinions about what they feel is important in their education, in their schooling. We have a number of students who have opinions about what's important, what's not so important and I'd like you to share the different opinions of these students. Then perhaps we'll ask you to come up with a few of your own opinions about your schooling.

Yeh, but people...listen to their friends  
a lot more than their teachers.

Yeh, I know but what I'm saying is that it does help.

It helps if the teacher can understand the problems  
you have.

But how many people would really, I don't know whether  
I'd wanna have my teachers knowing  
about my personal problems.  
I don't know, I think it would be rather embarrassing  
like say, they know about this?

Cause, you never want to tell your teacher.  
Your friends can usually help you out, like  
er, after the teacher leaves school,  
or things like that.

Well I find, like friends, friends are also when you  
have personal problems  
but when you get to, like, education,  
I think that like, the quality of the teacher  
is really important.

I thought you were supposed to learn at school and not have fun.

Well, it has to be balanced.

Yeh.

You need some fun.  
It's not all education or  
boring stuff.

I think teachers are okay because  
I listen to my teacher more than I listen to my mum.

My mum tells me to start doing my homework  
at a certain time and

I'll tell her I'm doing it but  
I don't really do it but....

Teachers seem more strict than your parents.

Yeh, but you should also, like,  
do your work to learn something.  
You don't just do it because you'll get in trouble.

I do my work if I find something,  
like if it's fun, like I enjoy doing it but  
if it's a boring thing,  
like just like plain questions and everything like that  
then you get you get bored and everything.

I, ...like, I know we shouldn't but  
sometimes it gets boring  
listening to the teacher  
always yapping, say  
"Stop", but they've said it before and  
you sit there, "yeh, go on" but  
they just sit there,  
trying to pass time, I guess.

You don't really feel comfortable  
working in a messy place.

Electives, like, make our day, like,  
they brighten our day, like,  
they're fun.  
Like some of the classes are alright.

Why are they fun?

Cause, well, they're not...  
like sewing and cooking -  
you do that with your friends  
and group work and everything.  
And then drama is, is fun.  
Cause you're, like, acting.

They go "I don't really need sewing"  
but when they're older and their button pops off  
they're going to go "What do I do?"  
At least they know that "Oh, I go like this".

(Laughter)

Also, drama, you know, builds up your confidence  
Like say you have to say a speech,  
like in drama you have to go up in front of people  
and act, and all that.

The next important thing would be challenging.

Like challenging work because  
that's what really makes education interesting.  
I don't mind going to school.

I don't mind anymore going to school because  
I have all my friends and  
they help me, you know so...yeh.

With me it's like/

Without friends, school would be really boring.

Uhm, we get along with our friends really well  
and have discussions with our friends  
and, like, open discussion,  
so the teacher is involved too  
and so we can all...participate in the class  
and uhm...

Just like R said, like, it's not paperwork, books  
and everything,  
it's when you play games...  
It's more fun  
unless the kids don't co-operate like...

If you play games with the teachers all the time  
uhm, you don't really learn things.  
You should have serious times with the,  
with your group.  
You shouldn't just...play games  
and let your teacher play games with you all the time.

You learn, you learn about what...  
what things like you need to know,  
but you also have, like,  
you look forward to the classroom.  
You don't like, "Well, I don't want to go  
in the classroom because it's boring and  
it's not exciting".  
But if you go into a classroom  
where they make it sort of fun,  
but you do learn,  
they make it in a fun way where you learn,  
then you have,  
you look forward to going in the classroom.

I think you have to have good friends  
... and good work habits, like very good work habits.  
You've got to have good teachers too  
cause they help you along and  
they help you with some of the subjects you, er...  
have problems with and  
same with your friends,  
they can help you too.

And ... your parents, too,  
they can give you moral support -  
give you a lot of advice and that.

If a parent is bossy and sort of tells you  
"Stay in your room for two hours and study",  
I don't think you're going to learn that much.  
But if a parent, or even a teacher, decides  
to put fun into it and say,  
"Study for twenty minutes every two hours", like that,  
I think you'll have more fun studying  
and learning more things about it.

Every time, like, what, just like what R. said,  
it's not like twenty minutes in every two hours.  
Maybe twenty minutes or half an hour,  
like maybe a ten minute break,  
have fun or talk to your dad or mum about something  
that you need,  
and whenever you need help, your parents are there,  
instead of like "Oh, don't bother me; I'm watching t.v"  
- lots of parents do that.

I think it is important to do well in school  
because in your future years,  
it will be easier for you to get a job  
and will be, it should make your job a bit easier  
if you have the right working skills  
and know how to do the special activities that  
you did in school.

The reason I think you need education is  
right now, you need math,  
to figure out things in a store,  
if you want to buy something or  
if you have to go grocery shopping for your mum.  
You have to pass;  
otherwise, you're going to be in school forever.  
And I don't think anybody would like to do that.  
So that's why I think education is important.

Is, you know, ... study hard in school is that  
if you don't study hard, your grades will drop,  
you'll get bad marks,  
your teacher will think that you're, er, stupid  
or an idiot, or something like that and  
if you do study hard,  
you'll get good marks,  
you'll be able to do more things towards the school,  
uhm, you'll probably have more responsibilities  
and that, if you do, if you do do your homework,  
then you're on, you're usually on the good side  
of the teacher  
and if you don't do your homework,

there's usually detentions or lines or...  
 you have to do something towards making up for it  
 and doing your homework.

A teacher shouldn't be very strict because  
 uh, it wouldn't be really that much fun in a class.  
 So I think he should have a lot,  
 he should have good discipline, like er,  
 crack jokes, maybe, now and then  
 and, and like, don't always be serious and everything.  
 Make,...I think a good teacher,  
 some of the qualities of a good teacher would be like  
 uhm, ...be, he could be understanding, like,  
 if you have a problem, like,  
 take it to him and he could help you  
 and uh, and ...

I think a school should be bright.  
 It's just like a library,  
 you don't see books all over the place,  
 otherwise, "What a library! Who wants to go in there?"  
 Like, all the books are on there,  
 so you want to walk in.  
 Same with a school,...

Instead of a bright, er clean building,  
 I think friends would be better  
 than having just a plain old building, like/

Yeh.

I'd be satisfied with just a plain old building,  
 like I wouldn't care what it looked like.

I look forward to school if it's a fun day,  
 if it has gym in the morning and...  
 electives in the afternoon and things like that.  
 I look forward to it.  
 But if I have science and then  
 I have other subjects I do not enjoy as much,  
 then it's kind of like  
 "Boy, can I act sick today ?  
 or somehow, can I break my leg?"

(Laughter)

## APPENDIX F

Judgment of Protocols for Reliability

Two independent judges each coded two sample protocols; their analyses were matched with those of the researcher and with each other. Judge A is a teacher with about twenty years of varied teaching experience. Judge B is a music specialist with eight years of teaching experience who recently completed a Masters of Education degree. Instructions for the analysis were presented to the judges in writing, along with a sample analysis. The judges worked apart and did not collaborate with the researcher except to check that they were following the basic procedure. They later explained that it took about an hour to familiarize themselves with the instructions and the grid, and about one hour to code each protocol. They enjoyed the task but expressed that it was mentally exhausting. Being teachers, they said that they found the protocols to be very interesting and were surprised by many of the students' comments, particularly about how boring students perceived school to be and the importance of their friends and classmates. They said it reminded them of how they used to feel when they were students.

A pair-wise deletion technique was used to assess the agreement of each judge's analysis with that of the researcher, as well as agreement between the two judges. By this method, assigned codes were viewed in pairs; when one code was missing, the other was deleted. Thus, only matched pairs were included in the

percentage. Under this technique, the percentage of agreement between Judge A and the researcher for the two protocols was 85% and 91%. Between Judge B and the researcher, the percentage of agreement on identified codes was 93% and 92%. Such a percentage of agreement was felt to be reassuring. However, the two Judges tended to under-code the protocols in comparison to the researcher. Without using the pair-wise deletion technique, i.e. including the omissions in coding, the percentage of agreement between Judge A and the researcher was 71% and 74%, and between Judge B and the researcher, it was 72% and 61%. As both judges stated, they felt unsure of themselves due to their lack of experience but expressed that the task became easier as they went along. Familiarity with the task may account for the researcher's more thorough analysis. Even the researcher found that the protocols were so information-laden and yet so repetitive in parts that one could not always account for every comment. Also, due to the richly descriptive nature of the research, semantics caused ambiguity at times. For some comments, one really had to be present during the interview to understand the gist of the conversation. Facial expressions, body language and tone of voice are not conveyed on paper. Since the students' wording was incorporated as much as possible in the grid, an adult might have some difficulty in coding the child's perception.

The Judges' codings were compared with each other. Again, utilizing the pair-wise deletion technique, the percentage of agreement between Judge A and B was 83% and 85%. Because there were many alternate omissions between the two codings, it was

impractical to assess the agreement without the above-mentioned technique.

Clearly, there was considerable agreement between the judges and researcher. At the same time, the disparities in judgment point to the difficulty in overcoming individual differences in assessment. In-depth research provides rich results; analysis of such results is lengthy and requires considerable interpretation. For future research, it is suggested that a simplified grid be used even at the expense of losing some depth and detail. Less choices would reduce the complexity and chances for ambiguity. Once the major parameters had been established, the researcher should delete minor or seemingly redundant terms. The major headings which reflect the most frequent responses would be retained. Also, identical characteristics, such as "fun", should not appear under more than one general heading, i.e. teachers, learning environment and relevance. Such repetition created a dilemma for the judges and, at times, the researcher. It is also suggested that analysis of protocols be conducted by a pair of researchers. Sometimes, the researcher favoured the judge's interpretation above her own. In so doing, a dialogue would ensue which would prompt thinking, just as it did with much success in interviewing the students.

## APPENDIX G

Coding GridClassmates' Characteristics

Academic	working - puts forth effort attentive positive attitude participates willing to learn enthusiastic, interested
Social	friends well-behaved, polite social place gets along, co-operative respectful not noisy helpful, encouraging gets along with teachers not "hyper", mature, understanding

Teachers' Characteristics

Professional	understandable-explains well proficient - good, confident, organized good student-teacher relationship balance - strictness control not lecturing punishes minimally no favorites, does not pick on one balance - fun and control
Personal	helpful, gives attention friendly, nice, approachable communicative fun understanding motivating, animated, enthusiastic, not boring not yelling, not frightening sense of humour not mean, not mad fair caring, considerate, co-operative encouraging, not critical relaxed, patient happy, positive attitude interesting, creative respectful balance - serious/fun listens

grid continues

Learning Environment

Curriculum Related	subjects drama phys. ed., sports electives music extra-curricular activities
Climate for Learning	fun not boring interesting, exciting discovery (research), creative challenge
Control	choices variety breaks movement -active some freedom of expression student input
Socio-educational	discussions groupwork, centres participation
Experiential	projects hands on games field trips visual
Workload	balance - work/ play less writing and notemaking on level of ability balanced workload - easy/hard less repetition

Homework

Amount	moderate evenly spread
Attitude	agree to be completed helpful disagree

grid continues

Physical Environment

Facilities	various facilities windows
Comfort	temperature controlled fresh air softer chairs desks to fit
Appearance	bright moderately clean colorful tidy

Parents

Intervention	helpful encouraging moderate control
--------------	--

Relevance

Personal	learning - education like - dislike interesting, exciting enjoyable, feels good desire to learn fun new ideas understand challenge remember neat-to-know better person get along and/or work with others
Practical	career future marks - tests, exams real-life application, useful, practical important life high school pass university success

## APPENDIX H

Sample Protocol

## Abbreviations:

- T - teacher
- S.T.R.- student-teacher relationship
- LE - learning environment
- CLM - classmates
- PE - physical environment
- REL 1 - personal relevance
- REL 2 - practical relevance

## PROTOCOL 14

Please note: The letters C and D denote the two students' speech. The unindented text represents the interviewer's words.

Coding

The first question is what things do you think are most important in your schooling. What would you consider?

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| C | Well, I think the most important thing in this school is how the teachers act towards you.<br>How and what they teach you<br>and how they teach it, and uhm<br>usually all the electives and uh activity periods.  | T - S.T.R.<br><br>T - proficient<br>LE - electives   |
| D | Well, like, for example, I think that you should be able to pick<br>like as we do for the electives to a degree,<br>but not as in high school where you pick every course that you take<br>because if you did that,<br>then people wouldn't take important subjects<br>like math, for example.<br>You need to know a bit about math in almost every job,<br>and uhm, stuff.<br>Fun stuff you should be able to pick, like<br>but I don't think, like, you should go into a classroom<br>knowing that when you come out,<br>you'll be a lot, you'll know a bit more<br>and go in with a positive attitude.<br>Because... you should be able to understand what,<br>how your teacher thinks. | LE - choices<br><br><br>LE - subjects<br>REL 2 - career<br><br>LE - choices<br><br>REL 1 - learning<br>CLM - positive attitude<br><br>T - understandable |
| C | Also, with a positive attitude,<br>you have to have a good relationship with your teacher<br>because, like say if you just walk and in a new<br>classroom and with a new teacher<br>and like you don't know her but<br>you can start of being very smart, and all, like<br>you'd already start having a good relationship<br>with your teacher<br>and she would know you better<br>and you would know her better.  | CLM - positive attitude<br>CLM - S.T.R.<br><br><br><br><br><br>CLM - S.T.R.  |

- D Well, like, the thing about teachers is though sometimes they have favorites and it is hard to get across, like, for example, if you don't, if you do do your homework for half the year and then you forget once or twice because you had a project to do. Then you'll be on their bad side the rest of the year.  
fair  
not picking on one
- T - no favorites  
T - balance - strictness  
T - approachable
- C Yeh, because the teacher will be expecting more from you since you are the best in the class and they won't make any exceptions for you since you are the smartest in the class.
- T - fair
- Okay. You covered a lot here. Any more things you think are very important to you in your schooling?
- D I'd say the most important thing to me is to learn.
- REL 1 - learning
- Okay, you've come to my next question. Go ahead.
- D Okay, to learn, you should be able to be willing to learn. You shouldn't fight it because if you don't want to you aren't going to remember it. For example, if you don't want to take a test and you think it is really dumb, if you spend most of the time just to avoid studying, you aren't going to do very well.
- REL 1 - desire to learn  
CLM - positive attitude
- C Like, if you have a positive attitude towards the test, you are going to get a positive mark but if you have a negative attitude towards studying, like I mean you're never going to make it to this and that, to a job and so on.
- CLM - positive attitude  
REL 2 - marks  
REL 2 - future  
REL 2 - career
- D And even if you did get bad on a test, you should think "Oh well, I should try harder effort next time and maybe I'll do better".
- REL 2 - marks  
CLM - working - puts forth
- C Like, you can't say "I failed this test now. I'm never going to do anything right again." And like, you're the teacher's favorite person and you let her down once. So you can keep on trying and win the teacher's trust back so...
- CLM - positive attitude  
CLM - S.T.R.
- D And also, er, if say you do bad on one test and you don't understand something you should always be willing to ask the teacher and the teacher shouldn't always be saying "Well, that's a stupid question. Get out of here".
- CLM - willing to learn  
T - not critical  
helpful  
gives attention
- They should be willing to take the time because that's why they are there for.

Now, you said you think the most important thing is having a positive attitude to learn. What do you think is the most important thing? (to C)

- C I guess it is a positive attitude to learn  
And to also have fun at the same time,  
like learn education in a fun way.  
Like you can't always be so serious and all that. LE - fun  
LE - balance - work/play
- D Like, without that fun,  
if you have it too much, to a degree,  
then you're not learning very much. LE - balance - work/play

If you have too much what?

- D If it is too intense degree,  
all you do is sit around and tell jokes and everything.  
So like, say for er science, you could do  
fun experiments  
and do interesting stuff so it arouses the interest  
of the students. CLM - working  
LE - hands on  
LE - interesting  
REL 1 - interesting
- C Yeh, like, you can't be so strict all the time,  
otherwise you, that starts the student to think  
that this teacher is really boring.  
Why should I even pay attention to her?  
Well, I say the teacher should improve her attitude  
toward so on,  
like make a few jokes and so on. T - balance - strictness  
T - not boring  
T - positive attitude  
T - sense of humour

Okay, so after the attitude towards learning, what would you put next as important?

- D A teacher's attitude towards you  
because if you don't like the teacher  
or the teacher doesn't like you, then,  
you not going to do very well. T - positive attitude  
CLM - positive attitude  
T - S.T.R.
- C Yeh, like, if you're a teacher  
and you have... like, a good relationship  
between you,  
like, you're going to do good  
because you like this teacher  
and if you don't like this teacher like, say,  
oh like you are going to get lower, say, on a test  
or something. T - S.T.R.  
REL 2 - marks
- D And, as well, if the teacher doesn't like you,  
they're not going to be as willing to listen to you  
or understand your reasons.  
For example, say the teacher did, that you don't agree  
with what the teacher feels  
and you are just sitting there.  
Okay, well if you argue, maybe the teacher will respect  
you but if you get really offensive or something,  
say your opinion is really dumb and  
they won't like you. T - listens  
understanding  
T - respectful  
CLM - polite  
respectful  
T - S.T.R.

- C You have to have good reasons to support your idea.  
And like, say... if, uhm, okay  
say that you never do your homework  
and you never do this and that,  
like the teacher will know that,  
why should I try and teach this kid  
because, like he's not even willing to learn.  
The student and the teacher, like,  
the teacher should give him more of a chance to him  
or her and the student should try harder in improving.  
  
So it is both on a balanced level.
- D And like, for example, I was saying you have to be  
willing to go in there but  
it is hard, like,  
you wake up at 7 o'clock in the morning..  
or sometimes it is even earlier than that  
and you feel really grumpy  
but you should be able to still get rid of that  
and still want to learn cause  
if not, it is going to be a waste of time.

Homework - finish  
CLM - working

CLM - willing to learn

T - encouraging  
CLM - working - puts forth  
effort  
T and CLM - S.T.R.

CLM - willing to learn

REL 1 - desire to learn  
REL 1 - learning

Now, what do you think the other students feel are the  
most important things in their schooling?

- C I usually think the other students around me  
feel that the physical education and the electives are  
  
fun because they find all these, er,  
subjects a bit boring.  
Most of them do.

LE - phys. ed.  
electives  
subjects

LE - not boring

Most of the students?

- C Yeh, usually, in one particular subject.  
And ...they, they, they like, uhm, certain subjects,  
like physical education because, like, you are  
active,  
you are having fun, at the same time,  
you are learning also.  
You are learning skills.  
And also, like, but I don't think they should feel  
that because they have, come to school to learn  
and they should come to school with a positive attitude  
because they are preparing for their future and so,  
like, you don't have a future if you are not going to  
do this and that - just concentrate on this.

LE - phys. ed.  
active  
REL 1 - fun  
REL 1 - learning

CLM - positive attitude  
REL 2 - future

So, do you think a lot of kids feel like what you just said?

- C Yeh.

What do you think (D)?

- D I think that most kids,  
I think that the way kids feel depends on  
who is teaching them.

T - proficient

Do you?

D Yeh, because if you have a really mean, grumpy teacher and...er, the students are going to hate that subject and call it the death room or something.

T - not mean  
REL 1 - dislike

Like what?

D The death room.

The death room? (Laughs)

D Cause, or but if you have a fun teacher, who is willing to listen and understands you, then they'll enjoy it more.

T - fun  
T - listens  
T - understanding  
REL 1 - enjoyable

And you think the others feel that way, in the class?

D Yes.

Okay. Now, without using any names, how would you describe your present schooling experience? Would you rate it as excellent, overall okay, good, average, fair or poor?

C I'd say between good and excellent because like, the things the teacher teaches are pretty good. Like they're really helpful and all but the thing that sets it down from excellent is because they don't teach it in a very fun way. Like, I think kids want to learn but they want to learn in their own way. They want to have fun at the same time.

Rating - good to excellent  
LE - subjects  
REL 2 - useful  
T - fun  
REL 1 - desire to learn  
LE - some freedom  
LE - fun

In their own way?

C Yes.  
Such as the teacher can't be so strict all the time.

T - balance - strictness

I see.

D I'd say exact same because for me, I enjoy school because I've noticed during the March break or the summer breaks, I usually feel extremely bored because I have nothing to do, all my friends have gone on vacations. Usually I don't go on vacations, so sometimes I just enrol in summer school just for the fun of it.

Rating - good to excellent  
REL 1 - enjoyable

CLM - social place

REL 1 - fun

Do you feel bored when you are at school?

D No, because there is stuff like exciting things going on... like sports going on outside at lunch hour. There is... clubs you can join and I very rarely feel,

REL 1 - exciting  
LE - active, sports  
LE - clubs

the only time I feel bored is when I am in a grumpy mood, because I got a bad mark or something.

REL 2 - marks

- C Like mostly on weekends people don't feel bored because all week they have been at school and it is different for them on the weekend. Like, I mean, like all your time is free except for homework and...  
Like, if you go for March break, like I was extremely bored in the March break during weekdays because I would get up early and think that school is still on and even without that feeling, you would still feel bored like, I mean, like prepare yourself for like eight hours of school. Like you are doing work, and eight hours at home, all you're doing is watching T.V. or playing games and a lot of friends are not around you, like people... all around the area of Nepean come to some schools and, like, all your friends are there and you can't visit them so often.

Homework - finish

CLM - social place

- D I think you should be able to, in order to enjoy it, to get a really good schooling, you should be more, you should be liberal. You should be willing to negotiate. Even though you think you're right, you should be willing to listen to others because without that, no one's going to like you and you aren't going to have any fun.

REL 1 - education

CLM - co-operative

CLM - respectful

LE - fun

REL 1 - fun

Okay. Looking at your different classes again, overall, how much improvement would be required to change your present situation to a perfect situation? A lot of improvement? A medium amount? A small amount? Or none?

- C A small, between a medium improvement, because the teacher's attitude toward you is a great deal, like it shows how the student acts towards you, and respond and like mostly teachers, I have noticed, throughout the years, they are a bit boring, like they are strict and all.

T - S.T.R.

CLM - S.T.R.

T - not boring

T - balance - strictness

So, you are saying a medium amount of improvement would be necessary for your particular situation?

- C Small to medium.

Improvement- small to medium

And you (D)?

- D I'd say small because the only thing I find bad about this, about is irrelevant subjects that you almost certain you're not going to ... like if you do a project on a little, on a tribe of thirty people in some African jungles, or something like that, like that's not going to help you very much/

Improvement - small

REL 2 - useful

REL 2 - practical applic.

C Unless you're traveler/

D But ... other than that,  
or the teachers, because, as I said before,  
they have favorites and that really bugs me.

T - no favorites

Now, C, you mentioned that you would describe your  
experience now as excellent.

C Yes.

And yet you feel that a small to medium amount of improvement/

C should be necessary.

Do you want to stick with that?

C Yes.

Okay. How do you think the other students would describe their present schooling?

C Well, most of the kids I know in this school,  
who want ...for the school to be more fun  
and like not all education.  
And, um, I don't think that way  
but most of the people around me think that way.  
That school should be more, a lot more fun.

LE - fun  
LE - balance - work/play

REL 1 - fun

D I think that for ... most of them,  
they aren't even aware of what is going on  
around them because they are too busy  
playing Dungeons and Dragons and stuff like that.  
I personally find that very, for lack of a better word,  
tacky, because they spend, for example, one English  
class, I won't use any names, but these two people  
are supposed to be working on book reports  
and they are sitting there playing Dungeons and Dragons  
I was so... like what are you doing here?  
Cause, and also, but I think that some subjects are  
enjoyable if you have the right person.

LE - games

CLM - working

CLM - attentive  
REL 1 - enjoyable  
T - proficient

C Subjects are enjoyable when  
you have your heart into it.  
But like if certain subjects,  
like if you want to have your heart into it,  
some students who find it really boring  
can wreck it,  
like just one student can wreck the whole class  
like drive the whole attention of the class away  
from the teacher and, uhm, like...

REL 1 - enjoyable

CLM - well-behaved

Do you find that happens?

C Yes. A lot.

D Sometimes, it is the other way.  
The teacher is too happy-go-lucky.  
What I think a teacher should do is to get,  
participate with the class

T - proficient  
T - balance - fun and control  
T - communicative

but not, like get too personal,  
like "so, who are you dating?" or something like that.

T - respectful

Right. Now, you are really giving me a lot of stuff here  
and we are nearly finished. When do you feel that  
you are really interested in what you are doing in school?  
I think you have discussed a lot of this already.

D Do you want the subject?

LE - subject

It could be. Whatever you feel. When do you feel really  
interested at school?

C Well, I usually feel interested  
in history and drama  
because drama you act out,  
you go straight with your feelings  
and how you want to act out.  
And with history, like, you find, I find it interesting  
because to learn about the past,  
like how man did this and that before us,  
without all the necessary accessories we have  
and uhm, so I find I guess history and drama the best.

LE - subject  
drama

REL 1 - interesting  
neat-to-know

REL 1 - like

D I'd say I enjoy, well, this year particularly,  
I enjoyed English because we didn't do very much  
grammar,  
that really bugs me because, uhm, I don't like grammar.  
So, like we usually do reports and all that stuff  
and I am good at that stuff.

REL 1 - enjoyable

REL 1 - dislike

REL 1 - like

Now, it doesn't have to be a subject. You can tell me anything at all, when you are really  
interested.

D Lunchtime.

LE - breaks

Why?

D Well, that's the only time you can talk to your friends  
without being, like/

CLM - social place

C There is only one recess in the whole day,  
and like you use it good/

D We're like, not little kids but, uhm, so, still,  
it gives you enough time to talk to your friends  
without getting a detention.

CLM - social place

And you feel that's important?

D Yeh.

C Yeh.

Okay. When do you feel that you are really learning a lot  
at school?

D When they are teaching something that  
I don't already know.

REL 1 - new ideas

Like, when I was in grade four through to six,  
I, my teacher he taught us advanced stuff  
and now, like, I know most of the stuff that we are doing ...

When he taught you that advanced stuff, did you find it too hard?

D No. I didn't.  
But some people did.

C I feel that when I'm really learning something  
is when I have my whole heart into the subject,  
like I really like the subject and  
I'm understanding what the whole, what everything,  
like, what the teacher is saying and  
she is explaining it in an easy manner  
and she is putting little jokes into it and all, like,  
you have to have a balance,  
not too much work, and not too much freedom  
of social activity.

REL 1 - like  
REL 1 - understand  
T - understandable  
T - relaxed  
T - sense of humour  
  
LE - balance - work/play  
LE - participation

D Also, when you are really enjoying it,  
cause if you like it you are going to remember it.  
If you don't want to remember it,  
you're not going to.

REL 1 - enjoyable  
REL 1 - remember  
REL 1 - desire to learn

Okay, now I want you to imagine that you are in a  
perfect school, a perfect class, everything is perfect.  
All of these things you mentioned are perfect.

Okay, could you describe this perfect situation?

(Pause)

Okay, there you are sitting in a perfect class,  
just describe it, the way it is pictured in your imagination.

D Okay, well you have partners.  
Usually you do stuff in pairs,

LE - groupwork

C Group work.

LE - groupwork

D Group work is the most important thing.

Why?

D Because then you get to learn stuff while  
you are still learning things about other people,  
your comrades.

CLM - social place

Why in partners or in groups?

D Because then you get to know other people  
and you feel more comfortable in a classroom;  
the atmosphere's better.

CLM - social place

C Your friendship could be improved  
and you could learn more  
and you are really interested in this subject  
because you are doing it together.  
Like, individual work, say a book report, like,  
you could spend an hour just doing something  
and finding this is really boring because  
you have no one to talk to,

CLM - friends  
REL 1 - learning  
REL 1 - interesting  
LE - groupwork  
  
LE - groupwork  
LE - discuss

and all you are doing is just sitting in a chair.

- D Also, someone, one of your partners might uncover information that you might have overlooked.

Your partner might uncover information?

- D And also it makes it more easy.

Okay, now what else in this perfect class, perfect school?

- D I'd say a robot teacher because that has no feelings so. Well, not completely robot/

- C Because, like if you have a teacher, like a human teacher, like, she can tell you jokes, she can make you learn in a fun manner. But just imagine a robot, like, talking to you straight, with big words, like long words.

T - sense of humour  
fun

understandable

- D If you have a, the only reason I would like a robot is so the teacher would be fair, would be fair with you/

T - fair

- C And highly accurate.

Highly accurate. Would you like a robot, (C)?

- C In some ways yes and in some ways no.

- D Yeh.

- C The ways yes you would learn in the most simplified manner and you would learn it really fast and you would learn it really clearly but with a teacher also like you won't get really bored depending on what kind of a teacher it is, like you could just sit in a classroom and listen to a robot and almost fall asleep.

REL 1 - learning

REL 1 - understand

T - not boring

- D Yeh, I feel the same way. The thing about the teacher is that he'll go over it again because he can blend himself to everyone's pace. The robot would have only one speed. If you don't catch it...

T - understandable

A teacher can adjust himself to people who are slower and spend private time with them

T - helpful

but a robot would say you don't understand and get out of here.

LE - at own level

(Laughs)

- C Robots also would be helpful in that they would be fair in a way that the teacher won't have a favorite student, like he'll be fair to everyone. He'll be asking say, one at a time, like in rows,

T - fair

T - no favorites

like asking questions about this certain topic and uhm/

- D He'll use the same system with everyone. T - fair  
Like, this person's a nice person, give him...

Right. Back to the perfect classroom. We sort of talked about the robot there. What else? What are you going to be doing? You have mentioned group work, pairs. What are you going to be doing in this perfect classroom?

- C Well, if it was too perfect, Not perfect  
like, you wouldn't really enjoy it because  
it is hard to put, like  
if you had a perfect classroom and perfect everything,  
then it wouldn't be, er...  
it would be almost like home.  
Like, it's, school is different than your house  
and it's harder.  
It means more work and  
it means you have to study really good and so on. CLM - working  
But, like, it is almost in your house,  
like you have a T.V. and everything,  
also entertainment.

- D I don't think anyone would be stupid enough to put in  
a T.V. unless it was for an educational program  
that was coming on but, like, the thing about,  
I don't think anything could be too perfect because  
perfection is, if you can achieve perfection,  
it is wonderful.

So, what are you doing in this perfect class?

- D Learning your brains off. REL 1 - learning  
working

Really?

- D Because that's what, that's why you have a classroom for. REL 1 - learning  
If it was perfect, it would be much more easier to  
learn in there because it would be the way that you  
wanted.

And how would it be easier to learn?

- D Because the stuff that you are doing, REL 1 - desire to learn  
you are doing it the way you want.

Okay.

- D So, that way you don't have to move to the fast lane  
if you are a slower learner. LE - on level of ability

You mean learning the way you want it, learning at your pace?

- D Yeh. Because, like, for example, in history,  
if you want to learn what happened in 1790,  
then the next day you learn what happened in 1880,

then that's too much of a hurry.

REL 1 - understand

- C That's like you're skipping a whole hundred years.  
Like you have just been back into the past  
of say how this cavemen learned and like you're  
suddenly to 1988 of like how man is with all these  
accessories and all,  
telephone and all.

Okay. Anything else about, I know you've mentioned a lot  
of things already, the teacher, and the electives, anything  
else that you would like to add that you would like to see?

- D I'd say more spacious, more space because larger  
classrooms are, well,  
a larger classroom the teacher can't devote very much  
time but also that way he doesn't give, he doesn't  
develop, like a personal relationship so that way  
he won't be very, he'll be interested in what  
what you are doing but not too...  
If a student had more space  
he could think clearly because  
he is not going to suffocate to death  
and also/

Class size - smaller  
T - gives attention  
T - S.T.R.

PE - space

- C He can understand better.  
Like he has a lot of space around him,  
like he is learning individually and clearly,  
like not crowded, chokingly.

REL 1 - understand

REL 1 - learning

Okay, so how many kids would be in this perfect classroom?

- C 25 to 30.

And how much room?

- D Uhm, well I'm not sure of the exact size  
but I'd say about the size of one and a half normal  
classrooms/

PE - facilities

- C Quite large.

- D The accoustics are much better so  
you could hear the teacher better as well.  
The sound would bounce off the walls.

PE - facilities

Okay, and...

- C I'd say a bit loud colours because, like,  
you can't come in to another white classroom,  
like, it doesn't bring out your heart into it,  
always. That's why most students, I think  
that's why most students think that it's  
so boring that you have to put colour in/

PE - colorful

- D That's why they colour in their books all the time  
I think.

They colour their books?

D Yeh, they draw little funny men...

Yeh. Okay, so do you feel that the colours around you affect you?

C and D Yeh.

A lot?

C Well/

D It inspires you.

As compared to, say, to the teacher, the importance of the teacher and importance of the colours and/

D I'd say spray the teacher!!!!

C Wear loud colours, yeh. (laughter from all)

Okay.