GETTING AN EDUCATION:
STUDENTS' VIEWS ON ENTERING AND EXITING HIGH SCHOOL

By

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ABSTRACT

A critical knowledge, social constructionist orientation is taken to exploring the views of students attending high school in Ottawa, Ontario during the 1999/2000 school year, a period of controversial, much publicized school reform. Arguing that previous research has mostly neglected to directly ask students about their experiences of the education process, I review previous work concerning students' choices and structure-agency relationships. Applying Goffman's (1961) description of the 'total' institution to the conditions of high school, I examine the viability of using participatory research methodology with student participants. Concluding that these institutional conditions render the theoretical participatory ideal unattainable, I develop, and evaluate throughout the research process, a multiple method approach that promotes opportunities for student collaboration.

Four sources contribute study data: analysis of policy and media texts used as representations of the social context in which the students' actions occurred; quantitative and qualitative survey responses; in-depth qualitative interviews; and research and student collaborator observations. Results offer practical knowledge contributions concerning the processes students apply to choices and decisions about educational and career pathways and some provocative challenges to previous conceptualizations concerning adolescent students and structure-agency relations. I conclude that when students are allowed to tell their own story of the action, student-agents emerge as active, reflective information seekers, tapping multiple knowledge sources to assist in their decision-making. Often articulating shrewd perceptions about both the constraining and enabling aspects of formal education structures, they acted to accumulate and apply social and educational capital to improve their chances of success in the formal educational stakes and thus, the game of life.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Finding ways to involve high school students in the creation of research about their experiences is an important component of this study. Over 300 students had some part in the creation of the data that inform this dissertation and I am indebted to each one of them for their willingness to participate and share knowledge. The enthusiasm they had for this research has been my ongoing inspiration. Very special thanks are due to the student collaborators (including my own son and daughter) who were my "Special Agents" throughout this dissertation process. My thanks also to the Ottawa-Carleton school boards who permitted the research, the school principals and staff who facilitated it in practice, and the teacher members of Ottawa Participatory Research In Education - Helen Hansen, Liana Krauthaker, Steve McCabe and Susan Smith - who worked from within the institutional structure to encourage and support me.

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Finally, I would like to thank my family and many wonderful friends across Canada, Britain and the United States who have believed in me and never allowed me to give up. I dedicate this work to all of you but most particularly, with love, respect and admiration, to my father, Howard Fellowes, who first taught me to separate a love of learning and knowledge from the constraints of formal education structures.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>IX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF APPENDICES</td>
<td>XI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I LIVE IN A SOCIETY WHERE I HAVE TO GO BTO SCHOOL&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Social Constructionist Approach: &quot;A Story of Action Within a Theory of Context&quot;</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructing a Dissertation: Merging Topic, Epistemology, and Social Context</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Climate of Chaos and Contention</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodological, Applied and Theoretical Contributions: Challenging Conundrums</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding Appropriate Methodology: Confronting the Challenge</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Applied Contribution: Questions of Practice and Action</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Theoretical Contribution</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telling the Story: The Scope of the Dissertation Chapters</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXAMINING THE LITERATURE: CONFLATIONS, ASSUMPTIONS, AND 'RISKY' CONSTRUCTIONS</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Established Critiques</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Matter of 'Risky' Constructions</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Assumption of a Partial and Incompetent Social Agent</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominant Knowledge as Desirable and Preferable</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Homogeneity of Subordinate Groups</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### CHAPTER TWO

**RE-FORMING THE FRONT-LINE OF EDUCATION IN ONTARIO: CONFUSING DISCOURSES OF CHAOS AND COHESION, PARTNERSHIPS AND FAILED RESPONSIBILITIES**

1. **Telling the Social Context of the Story: The social Constructionist Conundrum**
   - The Context of Educational Reform: Examining the Discourse
   - Re-forming the Front-line: Positioning the Teacher-Student-Parent Triad
     - The Positioning of Teachers: Saint or Scapegoat?
     - The Positioning of Parents: Asset or Liability?
     - The Positioning of Students: Responsible Agents or Social Wards?

2. **Responses from the Front-line: Negotiating Tenuous Rights and Conflicted Responsibilities**
   - Teachers: Organizing the Challenge
   - Parents: Bridge-Building Partners
   - Students: Ringing Their Own Bells
   - What impact, This Context of Action?

### CHAPTER THREE

**RESEARCHING AGENCY, OR AGENCY IN RESEARCH?**

1. **Between the Idea and the Reality: Examining the Participatory Shadow**
   - Troubling the Participatory Ideal
   - Evaluating the Realities of Institutional Restraints

2. **Maximizing Collaboration: Choosing Appropriate Methodologies**
   - Deciding the Research Agenda
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Designing the Research Instruments</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collecting the Data</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing The Data</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disseminating the knowledge</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action for Change</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER FOUR</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GETTING AN EDUCATION: UNDER PRESSURE AND MUDDLING THROUGH</strong></td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting the Results Stage</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample Distribution</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition Experiences and Perspectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences of Moving Into High School</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The &quot;Transition Years&quot; Program</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exiting High School: Facing the Future</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Attainments, Aspirations, and Attitudes</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Expectations</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Attitudes</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students and Work</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Work Involvement</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Career Aspirations</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viability of Student Aspirations</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views on Educational Policies and Practices</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflections on Teaching Practices</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Gathering and Decision Making</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Educational Policy and Practice</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-informed Informants</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filling the Knowledge Gaps</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving the Social Context of School</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involving Students in Policy Discussions</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER FIVE 205
"WELL, IT’S KINDA HARD TO EXPLAIN, BUT KNOW THAT WE KNOW" 205

Students’ Perceptions of Agency: “Know that we Know” 206
The Self as a Social Agent 207
Teachers as Dual Agents 211
Parents as Agents of Change 214
Collective Agency? Maybe 218

Perceptions of Constraint: “Your Life is Just Given to You in Chunks” 223

Reflections of the Official Discourse:If You’re Gonna Be In The Game You Might As Well Play 227

Looking for ‘Resistance’: “They Always Talk About it, But…” 234

The Negotiating Agent: Navigating Structure in a Context of Social Risk 241

Theoretical Implications: “It’s Kinda Hard to Explain” 252

CONCLUSIONS 257

“AND THAT’S THE DIFFERENCE” 257

Collaborative Research in the High School: Examining the Reality 258
The Collaborative Relationship 259
Inclusion of Multiple Knowledges 260
The Usefulness of Research Outcomes 261

The Students’ Story of Action: A Different Perspective on Structure-Agency Relations 265
The Emergent Profile of the Student-Agent 265
The Shifting Grounds of Resistance 268
Alliance and Negotiation: A different concept of ‘collective’ action? 270

But Is Anyone Listening Yet? 272

REFERENCES 276

APPENDIX A 288
SPECIAL AGENTS: PROFILES OF THE STUDENT COLLABORATORS 288

APPENDIX B 294
ALPHABETICAL CODE KEY TO SUPPORTING TEXTS CITED IN CHAPTER TWO 294
APPENDIX C 299
RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS 299

APPENDIX D 322
INTERVIEW CODING THEMES: CATEGORIES AND INCIDENCE 322
LIST OF TABLES

Table No.

1 Sample Distribution 146
2 Students' Concerns About The Future 152
3 Students' Educational Expectations and Parental Attainments 155
4 Students' Ratings of Skills Acquired via Formal Education 162
5 Student Employment – Sales and Service Sector 165
6 Students' Aspirations By Sector And Gender 170
7 Opinions About Proposed Reforms 179
8 Students' Use of Information Sources 186
9 Influences on Students' Decisions 191
10 Student-Identified Risk Elements 242
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure No.

1     Students’ First and Second Career Aspirations     169
# LIST OF APPENDICES

## Appendix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Special Agents: Profiles of the Student Collaborators</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Alphabetical Code Key for Chapter Two</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Research Instruments</td>
<td>298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Interview Coding Themes: Categories and Incidence</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

"I Live in a Society Where I Have To Go to School"

Canadian society heavily emphasizes the importance of formal education. In fact, there is remarkable agreement among politicians, economists, business gurus, social scientists, the mass media, and the average person on the street that in the 21st century world, formal schooling is a key investment and a competitive advantage both for the nation and the individual. Statements like this can be found in myriad sources, and heard frequently in every day conversations. Statistically, the benefits of formal educational credentials are so well established and widely disseminated as to be more-or-less indisputable. Currently, Canadian children are mandated by law to attend school between the ages of six and sixteen, and as part of the promotion of the necessity of completing high school and gaining post-secondary credentials, some provincial governments are considering raising the legal school leaving age to eighteen. But what do politicians, educators and social researchers really know about the students’ actual experience of this supposedly all-important process of getting an education?

Of all that is spoken and written about it, very little has focused on what students themselves have to say about this experience we glibly term, “getting an education.” Certainly, students in high school have been repeatedly subjected to surveys, attitude

1 Quotation from comments by study participant (136M12) concerning the effects of proposed school reforms in Ontario.
2 Although not an exact quote, this statement shares a number of words in common with Guppy & Davies’ (1998 p.xxvi) introductory statement In the Statistics Canada report Education In Canada. The commonality of such statements are both acknowledged and challenged by various contributors to Debating Dropouts (Kelly & Gaskell (Eds.),1996).
3 Of course, statistics provide an aggregate picture and while the above statement is true of the general population statistics also show that educational credentials carry less weight if an individual has ascribed characteristics about which there is social prejudice. Even so, such an individual has an advantage over another with similar characteristics and no formal education. Issues of social capital are a consideration in the discussion of study results in Chapters Four and Five of this dissertation.
scales, IQ tests, experimental learning designs, and observation. Surprisingly little research, however, has directly asked students how they experience being schooled. As Looker and Dwyer (1998a) acknowledge, this past research has provided information about the educational decisions and transitions adolescents make and the diverse outcomes which result, but has generally not sufficiently recognized the social complexity in which the educational process takes place. This failure to ask students directly and explicitly, "how they see the important processes in their lives" (1998a, p.9) has resulted in gaps in our understanding of adolescents' experiences of educational transitions. The position that I take in this dissertation is that this oversight derives in large part from the failure of researchers to conceptualize students as full, self-defining social agents.

What do adolescents entering and exiting high school think about the educational system that legally compels their attendance for a minimum of ten years? What awareness do they have of the policies that, directly or indirectly, define or influence their educational development? How do they experience the important transitions from elementary to high school, and high school to the adult world? How do they explain their educational choices and future aspirations? How adequately do they consider the education they are receiving to be preparing them for the adult social and economic worlds? Do we have the answers to these questions, or is it presumed that if high school students think about these matters at all, their views are immature and usually inaccurate parodies of adult reasoning? These are the basic research questions that drive this study and I contend that we do not have the answers to them in part

In an earlier draft of their 1998a publication, Looker & Dwyer (1996) specifically couch their arguments "in relation to the theme of agency" (p.1) and conclude that students' own agency in these [educational transition] processes has been at best a sub-text, rather than an explicit research priority" (p.15). The explicit discussion of the sociological concept of agency is absent from the published paper but it is present in Looker, 1997 p.9.
because the latter assumption has been an unchallenged component of most research approaches.

The questions posed above are quite functional in nature and may seem straightforward. Indeed, their retention into the operational components of the research instruments is clearly discernible, but exploring them theoretically and epistemologically proved challenging, both in terms of study conduct and results. The epistemological orientation of this thesis is critical knowledge, social constructionism that argues for a collaborative action approach to the conduct of research. The core theoretical focus is that which is at the heart of sociology - the relations of structure agency and resistance. The ‘stage’ for the action and its social context is high school, Ottawa, Ontario 1998-1999. In the remainder of this introduction, in keeping with my social constructionist orientation, I situate this dissertation in its social and academic contexts. I explain: the construction of the dissertation topic; the social constructionist approach; anticipated theoretical, methodological and practical contributions; and the scope of the dissertation Chapters.

**The Social Constructionist Approach: "A Story of Action Within a Theory of Context"**

Social constructionism (or constructivism) has a long and interdisciplinary history (Franklin & Nurius, 1998). It is a relativist, critical knowledge approach that evolved

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5 The 'operationalized' research questions are presented in Chapter Three. The research Instruments are provided in Appendix C.

6 In terms of substantive areas, as I discuss later, the dissertation topic spans the social construction of knowledge and reason, sociology of education (within which resistance to schooling has been a recurring concern), and sociology of childhood and youth.

7 This was the school year in which the main data were collected. However, the action, both in terms of the political context and collaborating student contributions began in 1996 and continued through 2003.

8 Goodson and Mangan (1996, p.41). I consider this phrase to be an excellent summary of the social constructionist epistemology.
because of a need to mediate between reductionist theoretical polarities that offered explanations of human society as determined either by social structure or individual behaviour. As a mediating stance, social constructionism facilitates bridging between disciplinary positions and has therefore been increasingly widely adopted by social scientists working in interdisciplinary environments. By attempting to understand and explain the complex and tangled interrelations of macro social structure, meso level community arenas, and personal action, the position offers a response to the challenge that post-modern critique has posed for traditional positivist approaches to social science (Franklin & Nurius, 1998; Lyddon, 1991; Morrow, 1994; Reason & Bradbury, 2001).

Post-modern theorists have demonstrated a complex and fragmented social world consisting of myriad subjectivities that cannot be conveniently explained by grand theory or elegant causal modelling. This critique of traditional sociology has challenged even the most treasured sociological assumptions and concepts (Gartrell & Gartrell, 1996). Taken to its logical extreme, the post-modern argument maintains that there is no shared truth, and therefore no basis for collective knowledge. This challenges the premise on which the sociological project is founded. If sociologists wish to reject the relegation of the discipline to the endless deconstruction of countless subjectivities they are, as Usher & Edwards (1994) put it, left stumbling around in "the post-modern moment" looking for a way to move forward on uncertain terrain. As "a refusal of totalizing explanations must necessarily involve a refusal of totalizing conclusions" (Usher & Edwards, 1994, p.207), innovative and flexible theoretical and methodological alternatives must be found.

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9 Franklin & Nurius provide a detailed discussion of the history, evolution and interdisciplinary customs re terminology. Evolving from symbolic interaction approaches, Berger and Luckmann (1966) are widely cited as foundation theorists in sociology, whereas Vygotsky (1978) is the usual grounding reference in psychology.
Social constructionism is founded on a set of assumptions that recognize the complexity of a dynamic social world. Multiple and constantly changing realities are accepted as a core social condition but so is the notion that structures and relations of power shape shared social understandings and experiences. All knowledge is socially constructed and the act of knowing cannot be separated either from the knower or from the social context in which it occurs (Goodson & Mangan, 1996; Lyddon, 1991; Morrow, 1994). To elaborate, the social constructionist position holds that:

- Structures and institutions are always part of the symbolic process by which people create, sustain, and reproduce their view of the world and themselves in relation to it.
- The social context will sustain certain types of social interactions more than others.
- The social context is not static however, but historically and culturally dynamic and mediatory.
- The dynamics of the social context may be experienced as either constraining or enabling, depending on the social situation of an individual.
- All people are, whether they realize it or not, constantly engaged in constructing and re-constructing a personal world-view based on the social information and experience available to them at any given moment in time.
- Some groups share particular social experiences and their world-views can be expected to contain common themes.

10 These arguments, and the following points, are also in keeping with Giddens (1976, 1984) as I discuss in Chapter One. Although Giddens is recognized as a constructionist, his work cannot automatically be assumed to incorporate all the components of the particular incarnation of the social constructionist perspective argued here. Therefore, I have not cited his work as a supporting reference at this point.

11 This is my distillation of the elements of social constructionism gleaned from a variety of sources. Primarily: Elyon & Lynn, 1988; Franklin & Nurius, 1998; Goodson & Mangan, 1996; Lyddon, 1991; Morrow, 1994, and many personal communications with Geoffrey Tesson concerning his work (see for e.g., Tesson et al, 1987, 1990, 1995).
The shared perceptions of a cultural sub-group cannot, however, be reduced to an assumption of homogenous social experience and behaviour. Power dynamics are inevitable. Because different sets of meanings co-exist in the social world, there will be struggles over which meaning is to dominate. In the day-to-day round of human interaction, some people have more power than others to advance their constructions of the social world as the one(s) that should count.

Of particular relevance to this project, are the attempts of some researchers and theorists to apply the social constructionist framework to understanding the social world as experienced by children and adolescents (Gaskell, 1992; Kelly, 1993, Looker & Dwyer, 1998a; Tesson, Bigelow & Lewko, 1987, 1991; Tesson & Youniss, 1995). The argument adopted is that children are as actively engaged as adults in constructing and reconstructing a personal world-view. Research evidence from the fields of cognitive learning and problem solving has particularly encouraged the elaboration of this position among social psychologists and sociologists concerned with life span and child development research (Eylon & Linn, 1988; Lawson, et al., 1991; Linn & Songer, 1991; Shapiro, 1989; Spector & Gibson, 1991; Stodolsky, Stalk & Glaessner, 1991). These studies conclude that school-age children acquire new learning by building upon and adjusting prior knowledge evaluated experientially. If new knowledge contradicts previous notions, children respond in a variety of ways, particularly by challenge or denial (Lawson et al., 1991; Shapiro, 1989). Other research has shown that a similar process is present in pre-school children (James, 1999; Steedman, 1982). Based on this evidence, social constructionists argue that children actively and reflectively make choices about the actions they take within the social context(s) they inhabit. Thus, age
and associated physical and cognitive development factors are only some of the constraining/enabling elements to be considered. These are, nevertheless, significant experiential elements that cause children and adolescents to construct a view of the world that does not always resonate with the view(s) advanced by the adults with whom they associate. They respond by constructing their own sets of interaction rules, which they adjust throughout their physical and cognitive development process (Tesson et al, 1987, 1990). Understanding the social relations of children and adolescents must, therefore, acknowledge them as dynamic social agents with unique world views and experiences.

In the social constructionist view, children can be expected to form world views that incorporate and reflect the main elements of the cultural norms, expectations, and biases (or as Foucault would put it, to reflect dominant discourses) of the larger society. Their understandings, interpretations, and applications may, however, differ from those of adults. As Tesson et al (1987) reflect, "children's social knowledge is simultaneously a product and a component of their social relations. Those relations have the effect they do in part because of the way in which children interpret them (p.37). Thus, sub-groups of students corresponding to those in society in general (based, for example, on gender, ethnicity or achievement) would be likely to offer sub-themes common to that larger social collectivity, but with variations common to their age peers. Tensions will likely emerge between the discourses of children from dominant social groups and those of adults.

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12 This article provides a particularly thorough summary of four research perspectives in learning and instruction associated with science education. Linn & Songer (1991) extend conclusions from the earlier article towards a more sociological constructionism.

13 The argument is that the basic cognitive process of knowledge building is the same as with adults. Neo-Piagetians like Tesson challenge interpretations of Piaget that draw hard lines between 'concrete' and 'abstract' developmental stages, arguing that acquisition of abstract thought is cultural and situational. Very recent cognitive science is, however, providing some impressive evidence of cognitive functioning differences among groups based on both age and gender. This does not undermine the inclusion of children as actively constructing social knowledge, but it does suggest that there might be differing cognitive reasoning routes even among adults.
more subordinate groups, but cannot be reduced to a set of homogenous cultural views. Even among sub-groups there are power dynamics, many different experiences of the social world, and diverse ways of thinking about these. Thus, to understand and document the social world of children and adolescents it is necessary to understand their perspective of the different relationships and actions in which they are involved. This is the social constructionist argument that I apply throughout this dissertation to a consideration of past literature, present policy, methodology and representation of the study results.

The social constructionist position outlined above is not, however, unproblematic. As noted, this is an evolving framework and as such struggles to find ways to successfully satisfy its own philosophical position. While the principles accommodate the lived-complexity of a social world in which actors hold multiple and shifting realities, they do not solve the difficulty of measuring this complexity, especially within any one research project. The challenge lies in finding ways to simultaneously research the macro and meso contexts of social action, alongside the personal accounts of the individual actors and many projects continue to be either structurally or relatively weighted.  

Even determining what constitutes the social context in which the "story" of individual or collective human action unfolds is no easy task. Systems of interaction employed by various social structures are highly interrelated (e.g. the economy, polity, education, media, and so on) and as previously discussed, individuals interact in diverse ways with those systems constantly reconstructing their understanding of them according to new experiences. In addition to being vast, the social context is also

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14 I do not pretend to have solved this problem. In individual studies perhaps some weighting is inevitable given the complexity of the task. Possibly a large scale collaboration addressing a particular research issue could fully meet the social constructionist philosophy in research
dynamic and thus cannot ever be conclusively mapped. The most that is attainable is a focus on elements of the context most relevant to the research issue at the time the research is conducted. But if the purpose of the inquiry is to discover actors' views on these matters, it is difficult to know what aspects of the social context figure most prominently in their reasoning. In recognition of this challenge, social constructionists tend to avoid apriori theorizing, but in the process manage to construct a conundrum for satisfying the principles of the approach.

I do not expect to be able to resolve this conundrum, but I do acknowledge and confront it. In an attempt to find a workable (if imperfect solution) I draw on the core of the social constructionist argument that we are constantly engaged in examining and building upon what we already know. The component of critical synthesis is thus, in my opinion, a vitally essential part of a social constructionist epistemology that I apply in Chapters One and Two of this dissertation. People may construct different meanings from their social interactions, but there are some things we can identify as nevertheless, generally applicable. As Dannefer & Perlmutter (1990) argue, "the human actor is more deeply influenced by his or her social context than the reverse...[and] Individuals who are in subordinate power positions...are especially vulnerable to having their developmental directions persuasively defined by the judgement of others, especially those who are socially defined as "experts" (p.127). Children and adolescents, as individuals and as a collective, are systematically and systemically subordinated in relation to adults in society. As Tesson & Youniss (1995) state, although "the constraints themselves do not determine developmental outcomes in some mechanical way" children and adolescents "are subject to the very real power that adults hold over them and the developmental avenues that are open to them" (p.116). Typically, children...
interact with the systems of family and education at the level of home and school. The two authority roles with most immediate power over them are parents and teachers.¹⁵ This dissertation is about students’ experiences of the education system and I therefore focus on the macro social context of that system and the way the relations of the parent, teacher and student agents are placed within it. The students’ story of these relations of action is situated in the meso arena of the high school. The mapping of this social context is taken up in Chapter Two.

The problem of incorporating both story and context into a study is only one of the major challenges the social constructionist faces in attempting to meet the practice implications of the philosophical imperatives of the orientation. As a critical theory of knowledge construction, the approach has further epistemological implications for the conduct of research and the choice of methodology (Kelly, 1994; Morrow, 1994; Reason & Bradbury, 2001). Exactly what these are remains a matter of debate, but in my view the social constructionist philosophy entails the following epistemological implications that pose a considerable challenge to traditional academic assumptions about the research process:

• If all knowledge is socially constructed and constantly mediated, the acts of theorizing, researching, and applying results (taking practice action) are inextricably intertwined and cannot be meaningfully undertaken as discreet processes. Each exists in a mutual dialectic with no element privileged.¹⁶

¹⁵ There are variations on this of course. For some children and youth spiritual leaders will play an important role. As can be seen from the results of this study, by high school many adolescents are already part of the workforce. There is also much speculation about the role of mass media in socialization. Nevertheless, unless the child/adolescent has become disconnected from family and/or school their interactions with other systems tend to be mediated by these primary attachments.

¹⁶ As Lois Gander pointed out in a personal communication (Canadian Forum on Civil Justice, 2002), research is a three-legged stool, useless if all three legs are not present and equal. Unfortunately, the academy has traditionally tended to either ignore or actively marginalize the leg of practice.
• Social constructionist research practice must position the knowledge perspective of
the researched group as essential to unravelling and understanding the story of how
and why they act as they do within a given social context.

• An analytical review of prior knowledge (or the lack thereof) concerning the research
issue should be undertaken as part of understanding and documenting the pre-
extisting social context;\(^{17}\) but prior theoretical assumptions should be avoided until the
actors’ explanations are available to allow a construction of a web of theory that is
grounded and meaningful to the researched group.

• As the social context is dynamic, dynamic research methods will be required to
capture both context and story.

• The researched group has a right to access the knowledge they have participated in
creating. Therefore the researcher has a responsibility to ensure that access.

In Chapter Three I take up these points and argue that combining methods to
create a composite picture of the various aspects of the research issue is a promising
way to proceed. Such an approach is, however, resource-rich and if not completely
beyond the means of small projects, certainly problematic to manage in a way that
satisfactorily meets all of the epistemological implications identified above.\(^{18}\)

Because the social constructionist position emphasizes the constant re-
construction of our subjective ’reality’ in the context of our social situation, experience
and resulting knowledge there is also an imperative for the researcher/theorist to
recognize and confront the subjective self s/he brings to the project and examine the
influence this may have on choices about topic method, dissemination etc. I turn now to

\(^{17}\) Such reviews aim to synthesise strands of related knowledge from diverse sources, mirroring
the cognitive process by which individuals construct their world-views. An acknowledgement of
the complexity and interrelatedness of this process implicitly also challenges the validity of the
construction of divisive disciplinary boundaries.
the task of placing myself into the social context in which the construction of this dissertation occurred.

**Constructing a Dissertation: Merging Topic, Epistemology, and Social Context**

During the course work year of my doctoral program, I decided to focus my dissertation on addressing the critical questions I have raised above. My Masters thesis, *Choosing Science: The Social Construction of Students’ Course Selection Decisions* (1994), had convinced me of the importance of talking directly to students about their negotiation of educational experiences and decisions. Results had also pointed to a need for a critical focus on the key sociological concepts of agency and resistance, at least as they related to the majority of students in high school (Stratton, 1996a).

My personal relationship with formal education has been less than smooth. Clearly, any doctoral candidate has somehow negotiated the demands of formal education systems quite successfully, but I am, nevertheless, also a former high school dropout. Born and raised in working class Britain, I left school at the age of 15 in a gesture of social and political protest - or so I told myself at the time. Only much later, after my discovery of critical knowledge sociology, did I realize that this was exactly what ‘troublesome’ students like me were expected to do. An immigrant to Canada (albeit ‘white’ and Anglophone), I entered an ‘open-door’ university as a mature student and

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18 Discussion about the viability of undertaking such an approach as a graduate student are included in Chapter Three.
19 There are multiple ways to tell the same story and no way to represent the absolute truth. Placing my ‘subjective self’ within this dissertation is not therefore, an easy task! For the sake of brevity, I have chosen to represent the ‘good fit’ between my personal experience and the dissertation topic and orientation. But, I think it is important to note that had adequate supervision been available to me, while my focus would have remained on children and/or youth, I would most likely have chosen the sociological arenas of health or poverty over that of formal education. In this regard I would have to concur with Dorothy Smith that the contingencies of life tend to play a large part in determining the development of career directions (cited in Ritzer, 1988, p.426).
completed most of my studies as a single parent raising two children, both of whom entered and exited high school during my dissertation process.

I think that this combination of life experience has equipped me, as well as any adult can be, to cross the lines of formal education, gain the trust of the students, and bring back and make heard what they have to say. My attempt to accomplish this has been beset with challenges discussed at various points throughout the dissertation.20

My personal life experience is also without question at the heart of the sociological orientation and philosophy I bring to this project. The critical knowledge social constructionist perspective I adopt fits well with my own world-view and boundary crossing life experiences. My introduction to this way of viewing and analyzing the social world is the reason I fell in love with sociology. I believe that it has the potential, if properly applied, to facilitate positive social change. But achieving the latter often also entails bringing to light the problematic nature of dominant, widely accepted social practices - an action that tends to earn sociologists the condemnation of regressive policy makers.21

I began my doctoral studies at a time when Canadian universities had already experienced several years of reduced funding leading to dwindling faculty, higher tuition, less student support, but (due to the social emphasis on the necessity of higher education) ever-increasing class sizes. Federal funding to the Social Science and Humanities Council (SSHRC) was reduced by almost 50% while Ontario provincial scholarships were also reduced.22 This was not the time to decide upon an ambitious

20 See also Stratton, 2002.
21 I find this an interesting aspect of the history of sociology. I feel fortunate to have been studying and researching in Ontario where sociologists merely suffered the public condemnation of the Premier for never having contributed anything socially useful. In other times and places some of us have been sent to prison or driven into mental asylums.
22 Currently this situation continues to deteriorate in terms of university funding, staffing, class size and tuition costs. SSHRC recently introduced first year Master's scholarships for the first time ever and there is talk, at least, of increased overall funding to this organization.
field research project. It was also not, in my opinion, the time for those with a social vision to settle for the status quo. I chose the challenges of the field – and then things really got bad!

**A Climate of Chaos and Contention**

In 1995, shortly after my decision to conduct interviews with Ottawa high school students entering and exiting high school, a Progressive Conservative provincial government was elected in Ontario. Within days of assuming office, the new Minister of Education declared to ministry bureaucrats his intent to invent a useful crisis in education.\(^23\) And that is exactly what ensued. The resulting period of chaotic and contentious educational change became the social context of my research project. While sociologically exciting, this disruptive and conflict-ridden climate was, in terms of its practical implications, quite daunting. First it necessitated the collection and monitoring of substantial amounts of secondary data relevant to understanding the unfolding social context of the students’ experiences. The insights gained add a richness that enhances the potential contribution this work may make to discussions of policy, theory and methodology, but they also necessitated an additional dissertation chapter.\(^24\) The identification of the themes of risk and partial social agency within the rhetoric of educational reform (and also sociology of education literature) resulted from the development of this chapter and has become an integral part of my dissertation discussion.

The work involved was, nonetheless, an added burden that lengthened the completion process. Further delays occurred when mandated school board amalgamations and the occurrence of teacher strikes combined to delay my entry into

\(^{23}\) See OC1a in Appendix B for the full reference to this event.

\(^{24}\) Chapter One covers the more traditional approach to literature review, while Chapter Two reviews the official discourse on education as it appears in policy and reform texts. The basis of this chapter was first developed as a Comprehensive Examination paper.
the schools for field research by one year. Again, the delay resulted in an unanticipated dimension to the research. The students entering Grade Nine in September 1998 became the last cohort to complete the Ontario five-year university entrance program (known as Ontario Academic Credits or OACs). These students graduated in 2003 as part of “double cohort,” vying with the first year of the new four-year program for post-secondary places and/or jobs. This situation raised many questions and provoked much discussion about the way in which political agendas and policy decisions can affect the economic and social future of children and youth who have no power to influence those decisions.

Methodological, Applied and Theoretical Contributions: Challenging Conundrums

I am far from alone in finding the social constructionist insistence that theory, methodology and action cannot meaningfully be treated separately a compelling argument. Nevertheless, it manages to incorporate many practical and unresolved conundrums. In following the epistemology into practice I have attempted to confront these challenges and arrive at workable, albeit imperfect solutions and I posit this as a contribution that spans the areas of method, theory and application. One of these challenges (which I return to in Chapter Five) relates to actually writing about the issues that arise. My first tussle with this problem occurred when I attempted to draft a preliminary version of this introduction that would serve as an ‘outline’ for the chapter development. How could I take the position that theory, methodology and practice exist as an inseparable, mutual dialectic and then discuss each as making a distinct contribution? Even if I do accept that in the interests of dissertation completion I must address each component separately, in what order should I do this? A theory of action must accept the necessity of its own application (practice) and recognize that the
conduct of research is itself an action, which is simultaneously theory and practice (as is of course, education – the dissertation topic).

I have not, in the course of writing the dissertation resolved the conundrum, but I have become convinced of the importance of raising it explicitly. There is a slow, but steadily increasing recognition within academia of the importance of recognizing and incorporating various kinds of knowledge and practice, but theories of collaborative research and action are rather more plentiful than systematic reflection on actual practice. In particular, the idea that traditional approaches to academic writing and research reporting might be in need of change has barely entered academic consciousness.25

With these reservations in mind, and underlining their dynamic relatedness, I have eventually decided to address the three components in the order in which my potential contributions are reported within the dissertation: methodology (Chapter Three) results most applicable to practice (Chapter Four) and implications for sociological theory (Chapter Five).

**Finding Appropriate Methodology: Confronting the Challenge**

As I discussed earlier, social constructionists face two major epistemological challenges: how to simultaneously capture social context and individual stories of action in the same study; and how to conduct research that meets the philosophical commitment of the orientation to the researched group, especially in highly constrained social settings. I have confronted those challenges throughout this dissertation process.

My attempt to map the social context by examining the discourses in the texts of educational policy and reform documents worked well for this particular study and

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25 Challenges do exist here and there. During the period of this dissertation research I have also been involved in a variety of university-community collaborations and have found myself writing about the issue of writing and reporting in a variety of contexts impossible to address in this context.
contributes one possible approach to meeting the methodological challenge. The circumstances of chaotic reform added considerable colour to available texts, however, and resulted in an unusual quantity of relevant media coverage that allowed me to also include that discourse in my analysis. It is therefore impossible to assess the outcome of my attempt under calmer social context conditions.

Regarding the social constructionist commitment to the researched group there has been considerable discussion concerning appropriate methodology with general agreement that a participatory approach is called for (Goodson & Mangan, 1996; Kelly, 1993; Morrow, 1994; Tesson et al, 1987, 1990). Kelly (1993) and Tesson et al (1987, 1990) specifically argue that attaining well-founded answers from students concerning the adolescent social world requires their collaboration in the attempt. On the other hand, there are many unanswered questions concerning the feasibility of doing so, especially when the research is aimed at satisfying PhD requirements. In researching the set of questions posed at the beginning of this introduction, this dissertation engages with the gap between the epistemological ideals and practical realities involved in attempting to democratize research inside a closed institution, and in the conclusion evaluates this attempt. As a result the dissertation offers a contribution to social constructionist and action research epistemology and applied research literature regarding the limitations and possibilities of the participatory/collaborative approaches in closed institutional sites such as the school.

**An Applied Contribution: Questions of Practice and Action**

From the social constructionist stance, research is a practice, conducting it is action, and theory is one possible application. Separating out a contribution that might be considered more "applied" than any other fits uncomfortably into the discussion. However, this study has a substantive focus on high school students' views about their educational process. The results of such a study clearly have a potential to be applied to
the action /practice of educating, which itself contains both a "theoretical"
policy/curriculum dimension and a frontline teaching practice. What is considerably less
clear is the potential application of this research to the actual student participants.

Viewing the matter of applied contribution at the pragmatic level for the moment,
there are some "functional" advantages to answering the research questions posed in
this study. If the global economy of the "Information Age" needs youth to attain high
levels of formal education then knowing what adolescents "know" about these matters
and how they perceive their educational process in relation to them, would seem
important to the development of effective educational policy, curriculum content and their
implementation. Indeed, if the concern is changing students' responses to components
of their in-school experience in order to promote increased educational success, it would
seem imperative (if much neglected to date) to understand how students perceive that
experience. One applied contribution of the present study therefore derives from the
descriptive value of the data obtained. This is particularly true of the primarily
quantitative results reported in Chapter Four.26

The critical knowledge agenda for the "praxis" component of research is not,
however, content with such functional and uncritical applications of results. The
dissemination of knowledge that may serve to trouble previously held assumptions about
a group of people is a paramount goal. This is especially the case where that knowledge
gives voice to the experiences and views of subordinate groups. It is important therefore,
to convey research findings directly to students and their teachers and parents in order
to facilitate discussion and understanding within and between these groups. The
involvement of students as collaborators in the research process has served as a
starting point in that process but does not fully meet the philosophical commitment of

26 Whether there really is any commitment to providing effective education is another matter - one
that is taken up in Chapter Two.
social constructionism. This is a matter that I will take up again at the conclusion of the dissertation.

**The Theoretical Contribution**

As stated earlier, my orientation is critical knowledge social constructionism and my core theoretical concerns are relations of structure, agency and resistance with a substantive location in sociology of education. For the past 30 years, reviews of the state of contemporary sociological theory have underlined the need to bridge this gap if better understanding of the reproduction/reconstruction of lines of societal power and stratification are to be gained (Karabel & Halsey, 1997; Morrow, 1994; Ritzer, 1988; Young, 1971). Responses to this challenge are ongoing in sociological theory, but sociology of education theory in particular continues to offer theoretical explanations that veer either towards structural determinism or individual reductionism. Although in practice the work of social constructionists can usually also be accused of bias in one direction or the other, this orientation is generally engaged in an attempt to unravel the complex interrelations of micro-macro knowledge construction as a necessary part of finding better ways to theorize structure-agency relations. My dissertation contributes to that effort by simultaneously presenting evidence concerning macro structural conditions and the actions of individuals in the process of negotiating those conditions.

Sociologists, regardless of theoretical perspective, have generally viewed the institution of education as a vehicle of social stratification that impacts the adult relations of students to other institutions, especially the labour force. The school site has also been widely studied as an important site of child and adolescent socialization, again with the focus on achieving competence as an adult social agent/citizen. Critical knowledge orientations that consider both education and socialization processes, have focused on various aspects of knowledge production and cultural reproduction. The research questions posed in the present study ask students to explain the construction of their
reasoning about the process of high school education, incorporating elements of the functional official discourse about education as the actual springboards to critical self-reflection. Presenting the results in Chapter Five, I argue that given the opportunity to reflect on their own actions, what the students have to say offers some strong challenges to assumptions retained by previous theories concerning structure-agency relations and related notions concerning resistance and collective action. Neither passive and unthinking, nor thoughtlessly (dangerously) rebellious, the social agents that emerge from these data engage in negotiation with educational structures as part of the 'game' of life.

In summary, this dissertation takes a different approach to looking at some core sociological issues with methodological, applied and theoretical implications for several areas of research literature such as the social construction of reason, sociology of education, sociology of childhood and adolescence and action research. In my opinion, the most important difference is that I have succeeded in giving the students a voice in describing their own thoughts, actions and experiences. The results provide a provocative context for future debate.

_Telling the Story: The Scope of the Dissertation Chapters_

In this final section of my dissertation introduction I provide a brief overview of the scope of the following chapters - the written text that represents the students' stories of action within a theory of social context alongside my story of the research action involved in gaining them.

Chapter One responds to the social constructionist position that previous relevant knowledge should be both critically reviewed and mined for strands of knowledge that can be processed innovatively in order to provoke new perspectives. I divide my
discussion into four main parts beginning by reviewing some established critiques of sociology of education literature, with particular attention to notions of agency and resistance. Next, I suggest that there are three themes and assumptions within the literature which are not adequately recognized and challenged: a partial and incompetent (‘risky’) social agent; dominant knowledge as desirable and preferable; and the homogeneity of subordinate groups. I follow this by also pointing to glimmers of evidence that suggest room for a different interpretation of adolescent social agency - one which reveals active social agents unravelling and negotiating a complex, and often constraining social world. Finally, I consider some possibilities for producing stronger theory and research via theoretical synthesis paying particular attention to: Giddens’ (1978) notion of ‘structuration’; Foucault’s (1991) thoughts on ‘governmentality’ and discursive practice; Goffman’s (1961) work on the ‘total institution’; and, Chamber’s (1997) understanding of the complex and relative power hierarchies among human agents.

The main purpose in Chapter Two is to provide a snapshot of the social context of getting an education in Ontario during the period of this dissertation. I have turned to textual records of official and alternative discourses about education to identify important thematic aspects of the discourse surrounding educational policy and reform. I begin Chapter Two with an explanation of this approach to representing the social context and then move to a discussion of the context of educational reform in Ontario identifying dominant elements and historic themes. Turning primarily to the period of reform surrounding this study, I point to the presence of the embedded assumptions previously identified in Chapter One. I discuss the way these are used within official discourses as instruments of power to stratify, construct and reconstruct a teacher-student-parent triad that carries the front-line of responsibility for educational success and failure. I argue that the degree to which members of this triad recognize, accept or reject their ‘official’
positioning provides an excellent reflection of the day-to-day contested, complex and shifting relations of structure and agency within the education system. I further suggest that this climate of contentious reform would make it very difficult for students to retain world views that were entirely uninfluenced by these matters.

In Chapter Three I turn to a consideration of methodology that can confront the conditions of a closed institution and still find ways to actively engage students in research so that what they have to say matters and is actually listened to. The realities of the conditions of schooling pose quite a challenge to the social constructionist position that research methodology should recognize and support the agency of those being researched. At a minimum, this means that the research participants must be allowed to directly contribute explanations of their actions because it is their understanding that determines individual and collective decisions. Also required is recognition of the power dynamics surrounding the research endeavour, especially when subordinated groups are involved. As noted earlier some researchers have argued that a participatory research approach (especially one employing qualitative methods) allows sufficient innovation and depth to accommodate social constructionist requirements (Kelly, 1993; Morrow, 1994; Reason & Bradbury, 2001). A critical knowledge stance should not, however, assume that theoretical recognitions necessarily meet the realities of practice and in Chapter Three, I trouble the participatory ideal by considering its viability within the structural constraints imposed by closed institutions such as the high school and the university. I then argue for, and develop, a flexible, multiple method research model that maximizes opportunities for the active collaboration of the research participants. After presenting the operationalized version of the research questions, I reflect on the successes and challenges of this collaborative model as I set it in motion in the research field.
Chapter Four is the first of two chapters that present the study results. Both Chapters Four and Five address the various components of the second and third research questions: What are the world views high school students have concerning the educational process? and, What are the relationships between the social context of education and the students’ views? As I have already underlined, applied and theoretical implications are entwined, and qualitative and quantitative results contribute to both. However, for the sake of coherent organization, the discussion in Chapter Four is based primarily on the quantitative data provided by 214 students who completed questionnaires, and is enriched by illustrations drawn from the qualitative interview and observation data. Demographic details about the research participants are provided, along with the following areas of results: educational attainments, aspirations, and attitudes; present work and future career aspirations; transition experiences and perspectives; views on educational policies and practices; and, leading into the agency-structure focus of Chapter Five, a consideration of how students gain and apply information in the process of educational attainment and decision making. Each discussion area concludes with a commentary on the implications for educational policy and practice. These results demonstrate that, given the opportunity, students are active, optimistic, information-seeking social agents who will engage in constructive dialogue about their educational experiences, choices and aspirations. There are also indications that it is important not to conflate social agency acts with efficacy of outcomes. Some consequential knowledge gaps are identified that point to a requirement for better informed adult informants and the need to involve students in developing policies that improve the social context of school. The chapter closes with an example of the kind of policies students in the study wanted to see.

Chapter Five discusses data concerning five related areas of the students’ views and reflections: agency perceptions of self and others; perceptions of how structure
constrains or enables personal agency; how the official discourse is, or is not, reflected within students’ views; the presence of resistance themes; and, structure-agency negotiations in a social context of risk. Throughout, I consider the theoretical implications of the students’ views and conclude that they challenge previous conceptualizations of structure-agency relations within the school and other closed institutions, and most particularly the role of ‘resistance’ in those relations. Very social and startlingly reflective, these students do everything possible to develop and preserve personal agency in a world portrayed to them as dangerously risky - in and out of school. The students’ reflections pose challenges for traditional conceptualizations of resistance, collective agency and collective action for change and I suggest that rather than collective action or individual rebellion, most students opt to engage in collective interactions. That is forming shifting networks and alliances that can improve the individual’s position in the educational stakes.

In my concluding chapter I take an action potential approach to reviewing the implications of the study results. I first fulfil the promise made at the end of Chapter Three to evaluate the viability and outcome of conducting collaborative research in the high school setting. I make my assessment by addressing three key questions: What is the quality of the collaborative relationship?; To what extent is there inclusion of multiple knowledge perspectives?; Are the research outcomes appropriate and useful to the collaborating communities? I continue by highlighting the related action implications of three areas of the results that are significant for practice, research and theory: the emergent profile of the student-agent: the shifting grounds of resistance; and alliance and negotiation as strategies of action.

A fundamental conclusion of this dissertation is that when students are engaged in research as social agents with opinions that really matter, a profile of the student-agent emerges that challenges previous conceptualizations of educational structure-
agency and resistance relations. In particular, students reveal shifting grounds and
dynamics of resistance and strategies of alliance and negotiation to gain structural
advantages that contest traditional definitions of resistant acts and collective action. I
argue that the epistemological orientation of the dissertation study is what made the
difference to the story of action that emerges from the data and I offer some concerns,
challenges, and suggestions for future action based on the findings from this study.
CHAPTER ONE
Examining the Literature: Conflations, Assumptions, and ‘Risky’ Constructions

The purpose of this chapter is to examine critically previous knowledge relevant to the present research questions. I divide my discussion into four main parts beginning with a discussion of some established critiques of sociology of education literature, with particular attention to notions of agency and resistance. 27 Next, I raise the matter of “risky constructions,” identifying four themes and assumptions present in the literature but which have not, to date, been adequately recognized and challenged. I follow this by also pointing to evidence (especially from recent research that takes a social constructionist approach) that offers glimmers of a student perspective that suggests room for a different interpretation of adolescent social agency. This evidence brings into view what has previously been missing – a sense of adolescents as active social agents unravelling and negotiating a complex, and often constraining social world.

Finally, I consider some possibilities for theoretical synthesis that can move us towards new understanding, stronger theory, and better research about the social construction of adolescents’ social identity, action (including choice and resistance) and their interrelation with the structures of state-mandated education. 28 My position is that notions of agency and resistance have generally been conflated and that untangling

27 As is often the case with theoretical ideals, the social constructionist intent to mine all past relevant knowledge presents a task that is impossible in practice. It would clearly be infeasible for the purposes of this dissertation to do so. Even defining what exactly counts as sociology of education literature is problematic (see for example the array of relevant research noted by Looker and Dwyer, 1998a.). I have attempted to identify key reviews, critiques, and other important past and current contributions as the focus of my discussion. This chapter is distilled from several hundred pages of notes and discussion, which cover many other worthwhile contributions to the literature.

28 As I argue in my introduction, I believe this discussion has sociological import beyond the confines of public education and adolescents. Certainly there is relevance to adolescents in other
them involves looking at the component parts of what counts as social agency. These include the construction of self-and collective-identity, and the processing of constraint, choice and risk factors involved in taking action from the resulting world-view. In that regard, I consider the contributions and limitations of: Giddens’ (1978) notion of ‘structuration’; the implications of Foucault’s (1991) thoughts on ‘governmentality’ and discursive practice; the overlooked relevance of Goffman’s (1961) work on the ‘total institution’; and, Chamber’s (1997) discussion of ‘uppers’ and ‘lowers’ as a way of understanding the complex and relative power hierarchies among human agents.

**Some Established Critiques**

One longstanding, and internationally agreed upon, critique of sociology of education research and theory has been its failure to successfully bridge the macro-micro, structure-agency divide (Karabel & Halsey, 1977; Mehan, 1992; Morrow, 1995; Richer, 1990). While it can be argued that this problem is at the heart of all sociological inquiry, the study of education systems perhaps poses a particular conundrum for ‘pure’ theory, as mass education is essentially functional and practice-based in nature. Very few theorists have suggested the abandonment of mass education; rather, critiques of the functionalist view have focused on the cooptation of content and/or inequality of access.\(^{29}\)

In a 1977 critical review of the state of sociology of education research, Karabel & Halsey cite the British battle between the ‘new’ (interpretative) and ‘old’ (normative) approaches to educational inquiry as an example of oppositional orientations. They urge settings, and I would argue also to understanding structure, agency and resistance issues among any subordinated group, especially in relation to other ‘closed’ institutions.

\(^{29}\)The work of Freire provides an illustrative example of this. Where the focus is on oppressed people in under-developed countries, the argument is for the establishment of free mass
a synthesis of knowledge that draws on strengths of classic works such as Durkheim, which although functionalist in orientation, does engage with the messy social context of theory, method and delivery of education.\footnote{Colm Kelly (1990) has also pointed to the importance of recognizing that \textit{Moral Education} (Durkheim, 1925) is simultaneously theory and practice.} Karabel & Halsey argue that debates about ‘pure’ versus ‘contaminated’ research are pointless as the social context is the origin of both truth and error. Instead, they urge sociologists to grapple with the problem of the influence of social context on theory, research, policy, and social action at both macro and micro levels.

Also published in 1977 was Paul Willis’ landmark ethnography, \textit{Learning to Labour}, which focused on (male) working class resistance to schooling. Willis concluded that such resistance only led to cultural reproduction of lower social status. The effect of this cultural studies response to the macro focus of structurally determinist Marxist positions was remarkable. It has generated over 20 years of critical discussion and response (Giroux & Freire, 1987; Davies, 1995a, 1995b; Kelly & Gaskell, 1996; Livingstone & Sawchuck, 2000; McRobbie, 1978, 1980; Mehan, 1992; Richer, 1990), as well as other notable ethnography-based discussions of schooling in the United States and Canada (such as Everhart, 1983; McLaren, 1993; Solomon, 1992). Nevertheless, recent critical overviews still point to the failure to bridge a structure-agency (macro-micro) dichotomy of focus (Davies, 1995b; Mehan, 1992; Morrow, 1995).

One particularly persistent critique of Willis (1977) is the irreconcilable tension between the theory advanced and the ethnographic evidence actually presented (Davies, 1995a, 1995b).\footnote{Davies points to a romanticized conflation in the conceptualizations of agency, resistance and class consciousness, and a subsequent education. It is only after the privilege of widely accessible mass education is an established fact that intellectuals have the luxury to turn a critical eye on the imperfections of such an institution.}
failure to clearly operationalize already fuzzy concepts. At times, the definition of resistance became so broad that “anything short of joyful compliance” is viewed with partisan meaning (1995b, p.1468). He suggests that the resulting irreconcilable tensions led to the development of a critical post-Marxist theory (essentially critical pedagogy), which attempted to bypass the Marxist need to discover the immanent emergence of agents of social resistance. He contends that, in the process, a definition of ‘true’ resistance was advanced that demanded the resister be simultaneously “anticapitalist, antipatriarchal, antihomophobic, and promulticulturalist” (1995b, p.1469). He further notes (no doubt tongue-in-cheek), that “the lone documented instance of actors engaging in true resistance are the critical pedagogues themselves” (1995b, p.1469).

I would add to Davies' critique the observation that the 'post-Marxist' position does not, in fact, remove the need for the emergence of agents of social change. It merely positions the need as a staged process in which first critical pedagogues must raise the consciousness of their non-critical colleagues so that then they can, in turn, develop critical consciousness in the students, who being ordinary people, are "crushed, diminished, converted into a spectator, manoeuvred by myths which powerful social forces have created" (Freire, 1973, p.6). Such a view of students (be they adolescent or adult) contains a seldom challenged assumption of a state of partial (incomplete) and

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31 My reading of Everhart (1983) and McLaren (1993) suggests this critique is equally applicable. The ethnographic evidence provides, at best, tenuous support for the apriori theorizing. More detailed discussion of this is presented in my comprehensive paper (1996b).
32 Davies' critique is connected to a quantitative attempt to define and operationalize previously employed concepts of resistance (1995a). He statistically tests the viability of these concepts and concludes that little variance in school achievement is explained by resistance variables. Given his own criticism of the problematic conflation of the concepts in the research literature, this attempt is clearly beset by reliability and validity issues. Davies does not, however, challenge the actual notion of what constitutes resistance to the structural constraints and social inequalities of negotiating the school system.
33 There are many examples of the kinds of discussions on which Davies bases his critique. Some examples are Aronowitz and Giroux (1993); Freire (1973); Giroux & Freire (1987); Giroux & McLaren (1989). In my opinion, the work of Apple (1982, 1990, 1993) offers an alternative discussion of the role of critical pedagogy that advances a different conceptualization of the
incompetent social agency related to whose knowledge counts as valuable. This assumption (along with others concerning the homogeneity of human collectives) is perpetually placed within a context of social risk, and it is to a detailed discussion of these themes in sociology of education literature that I now turn.

**The Matter of ‘Risky’ Constructions**

My analysis of reform and policy texts (discussed in Chapter Two) reveals a blatant construction of adolescence as occurring in a context of perpetual social risk. Students are presented as simultaneously at social ‘risk’ (vulnerable, incomplete, incompetent and in danger from themselves and others) and also ‘risky’ social propositions (irrational, deviant and a moment away from being dangerous to society).

Under such a social construction the argument follows that students necessarily require both imposed control and intervention—decisions can, and must, be made for them and imposed upon them for their own good.

The point I wish to make in this chapter is that this construction (although often less blatant) is also present in sociological considerations of children and adolescents and identifiable within sociology education literature from all substantive areas and theoretical orientations. Exactly who is at risk, and from what, varies by orientation, but the lens of social risk remains.

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student. Morrow (1995) also notes a theoretically-rooted distinction between the work of Apple and Giroux.

34 Much might be said about the construction of risk, especially concerning what, is and is not, considered ‘risky,’ and other researchers are currently engaged with the issues. Schhissel (1997) examines similar themes in the historic context of discourse on youth crime. Tillechek (2003) troubles perceptions of adolescent risk-taking connected to health and ‘dangerous’ behaviour. Dehli (1996) discusses the risk construction in the context of dropouts. Some discussion relevant to critical considerations of risk conceptualizations also emerges from the results of this study presented in Chapters Four and Five.

35 For example, consider the focus on ‘dropping’ out as opposed to ‘staying in’ school; on those who make ‘wrong’ course and career decisions; poor and minority students with ‘problems’ as opposed to those who ‘succeed.’ I wonder how we can expect to understand so called deviance and failure if we do not first understand how engagement and success is achieved.
The positioning of the non-compliant student as a danger to society is probably most clearly drawn in classic functionalist work such as Durkheim (1925) and Parsons (1959). Durkheim (1925) feared that students were liable to rebel and the fuller with knowledge they became, the more likely this was. They believed individual autonomy was important and that the goal of education was to teach self-restraint, but undisciplined “agitation” in a collective classroom could not be allowed. To do so was morally dangerous as it might lead to a mob or crowd that posed a threat to society. With structurally deterministic perspectives (such as Bowles & Gintis, 1976) the focus is on the risk societal structure poses to the subjugated student. Cultural reproduction and critical pedagogy orientations place the student at risk from the dominant structures of knowledge and themselves. More practice-focused, life-course and status attainment research and theory seems to combine elements of both functionalist and critical positions, but the construct of social risk never falters. Of course, life entails some social risks, but this is not the issue I am raising. What I wish to highlight is the way the notion of social risk is constructed and applied to a consideration of students as social agents. My point is that if this social construction is unrecognized and unchallenged it becomes an insidious part of the theory, research and practice we create.

**The Assumption of a Partial and Incompetent Social Agent**

Associated with the construction of adolescence in a social context of risk is the assumption that the adolescent is, at best, a partial social agent, and an incompetent one at that. The retention of this assumption is necessary to the risk construction and also supported and encouraged by it. Nevertheless, maintaining the assumption often

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36 This is essentially also the position taken by sociology of education theorists applying the work of Foucault to education (e.g., Goodsen & Dowbiggen, 1990; Usher & Edwards, 1994. The
leads to tensions of thought. Durkheim (1925) again provides an excellent example of this. Early in *Moral Education* he expresses a surprisingly social constructionist view of students, placing them at centre stage in the educational process. He declares this is “a methodological requirement” because “we cannot usefully treat any teaching problem, whatever it may be, except by starting...with the conditions confronting the children with whom we are concerned”(p.17). Later, however, he describes students as empty vessels, hypnotized and uncritically accepting of new ideas, although at times they might need firm encouragement to sit still and be filled up (taught) (pp.139-142). For Durkheim, the child can and will act, but these are not the actions of reason; the child is uncivilized and must be ‘acted upon’ by the agent-teacher in order to be taught the discipline that leads to the only true autonomy. It is not surprising that such contradictory views led Durkheim to desperate, but unconvincing, attempts to distinguish resistance for social good, from rebellion for its own immoral gratification. Similar themes and tensions, in various guises, can be traced throughout sociology of education literature, and I will return to some of these later in this chapter when I discuss glimmers of different student perspectives.

Durkheim’s struggle with these confusing conceptualizations left us with another very important theme to which I wish to draw attention. The *Moral Education* lectures embody a hierarchy of social agents. First, there is reified *education*, itself the agent of the social moral climate (which in Parsons (1959) becomes an *agency*). Second, there is the *agent-teacher*, a constrained agent of society who, via the educational institution, must represent moral consensus and promote conformity. Finally, there is the *child-student*, an active but unthinking partial agent, dangerous if not constrained, and therefore to be *acted upon* and properly educated.

Theoretical details are perhaps more complex, but the notion of docile bodies disconnected from intellect and spirit strikes me as quite similar.
This hierarchy of agents can be traced throughout the literature, complete with attached assumptions, regardless of the political orientation. Sometimes, the student-agent disappears altogether, as the reified structure becomes the overwhelming focus (e.g., Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Young 1971). From this theoretical position, the teacher-agent unthinkingly does the work of the agent of control (the education system). In contrast, the writings of critical pedagogues tend to reify the teacher-agent in a fashion that is eerily reminiscent of Durkheim. True, the radical/critical educator's task is of a different political colour, but the goal is still the same - emancipation of the student from the oppression of their own ignorance. The student (child or adult) is generally posited as active and thinking, but only a potential agent, who needs guidance to develop the right kind of consciousness.

The failure to allow even the possibility that students may act as competent social agents has, I suggest, contributed to the retention of vague notions about resistance. I contend that the assumption that youthfulness alone renders an individual as an incomplete and incompetent social agent is, in fact, quite logically fragile. Of course, there are real considerations of physical and cognitive maturity that must be recognized, but similar considerations also apply to portions of the adult population, either permanently or temporarily.\textsuperscript{37} Furthermore, it is often posited that, having lived only a relatively few years, adolescents have insufficient life-experience to inform capable action. A moment of reflection disturbs the validity of this argument. Some children arrive at adolescence with some experiences many adults have fortunately not had to acquire (for example, those who immigrate after spending time in war zones and refugee camps; those who endure abuse at the hands of adults; and many more

\textsuperscript{37} Indeed, most of what I argue here also applies to such adult groups (e.g., the disabled, chronically ill, aged, and even the uneducated and poor). This is really the point here - age itself is not the determining factor in whether dominant society regards (idealistcally or actually) an individual as a competent social agent.
examples). Work that has engaged with children as social agents demonstrates that they do not merely adopt adult social rules for negotiating the social world, but construct their own rules to manage their particular position in it, and they adjust these rules as this changes throughout their development into adults (Tesson, Bigelow & Lewko, 1987, 1990).

**Dominant Knowledge as Desirable and Preferable**

Once we recognize that children are constructing their own rules of social action (that is an action-related knowledge set based on a non-dominant knowledge world view), questions must be raised about the assumption that dominant knowledge is ‘better’ and universally desirable because, of necessity, those who possess it are more socially competent. Although critical knowledge perspectives of schooling have frequently pointed out the class, ethnic and gender biases contained in the content of curriculum, the use of language, and pedagogical approaches (Bernstein, 1979; Giroux & McLaren, 1989; Keddie, 1971; Walkerdine, 1990; Young, 1971), they invariably still argue that education provides the potential for emancipation, empowerment, and the achievement of social equality. The advantages of learning the dominant knowledge form (that is the form of knowledge mastered and understood as superior by the researchers and critical pedagogues) are assumed desirable to the subordinated group. Only acquisition of the pedagogues’ form of knowledge can lead to emancipation. As Davies (1995b) also comments, for many theorists and researchers it is simply “unimaginable that many…youths may hold different understandings of their ultimate interests” (p.1472).

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38 There are examples of this assumption throughout the work of Freire. Note in Freire (1973) how he holds his kind of knowledge as superior to the informal knowledge structure of the peasants concerning animals (p.4). The peasants’ persistence in retaining their own view seems to puzzle Freire (p.163). Whose consciousness about oppression was it that needed raising?
Many researchers (such as Willis, 1977) also assume that white-collar (mind) work is more desirable and enjoyable than blue-collar (manual) labour,\(^{39}\) and that such a world-view is more cogent and desirable than those held by members of subordinate groups.\(^{40}\) It is not the unequal social value and rewards assigned to kinds of work and knowledge that is challenged, but the inferiority of the alternative world-view that is proclaimed. Once again, the original supposition of the partial and incompetent social agent allows the retention of the assumption that the dominant knowledge form is desirable and preferable. In turn, the latter notion feeds the perception of partial social agency among subordinated groups.

**The Homogeneity of Subordinate Groups**

Following directly from the above point about the assumption of what is superior/inferior knowledge, is the notion that the members of sub-groups have a homogeneous culture-knowledge and shared world-view. Assumptions of homogeneity and harmony that characterize functionalist accounts have been roundly criticized by research that raised the issues of class, gender, and race/ethnicity. No doubt most researchers today would be quick to claim that they are well aware of issues of heterogeneity. I contend, however, that the notion that groups with shared cultural characteristics also share common social relations and views appears to have remained more-or-less unchallenged.\(^{41}\) Working class white boys are, for example, assumed to

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\(^{39}\) Admittedly, electronic information technology work blurs the lines of this distinction, but I would argue that a similar assumption hierarchy has emerged about which kinds of high technology work are more or less valuable.

\(^{40}\) For example, Willis states; “cultures live their own damnation...working class kids condemn themselves to a future of manual work” (1977, p.174, emphasis added).

\(^{41}\) Looker and Dwyer (1998a,1998b) do speak to the complexity of sub-groups arguing that while differences among social sub-groups (such as gender) are an important part of how individuals experience the social world we need a closer look at the odds against which some students have persisted.
share one particular view of the world, working class white girls another, and so on by
sub-group. The groups become more and more fragmented but the idea of homogeneity
is not dispelled.

To illustrate this point, McRobbie’s (1978) research on working class British girls
is a direct response to Willis’ focus on working class boys. She concludes that the girls
do not ‘act out’ their rebellion like the boys, but ‘resist’ by exaggerating the stereotypical
roles of femininity and quitting school for early marriage and child bearing. These girls
she argues, have less mobility than the boys, seldom straying beyond the immediate
neighbourhood, and as a consequence having limited social horizons and imagination.42
Similarly, Gaskell (1992) concludes that girls adopt “modes of coping” rather than overt
forms of resistance (p.57). The assumption that females are passive is not contested,
and Walkerdine (1990) takes this one step further. Girls she argues must be silent and
passive if they are to succeed. There is really no choice, because to be assertive is to
surrender one’s femininity--to compete for the phallus (pp.49-51). The clever, assertive
girl stands doubly condemned; she has sold out to the enemy by simultaneously wanting
to be him and at the same time placing her feminine-self more directly in his dominating
gaze.43 Worse yet, to even entertain this unattractive option, the clever girl must also be

42 This seems a useful point at which to note some other important concerns about the resistance
literature. Some ethnographers seem to have a pronounced aversion to counting anything at all,
including the number in their total sample (e.g., Willis, 1977; McLaren, 1993) leading to serious
questions about the representativeness of anecdotal accounts. While Willis focused on the
minority of rebellious ‘lads,’ McRobbie’s response is based on the majority of passive females,
which puts in doubt any comparative validity. Age at high school entry (and to a lesser extent,
graduation) varies by country and even province or state. Gaskell (1992) indulges in a form of
credential inflation that views those who ‘fail’ to continue on to post secondary programs as
educational “dropouts” (although this has now become a standard position in educational
discourse).
43 It is not clear how this would pan out if the teacher were female! Perhaps to be female and
teach high school is to have become ‘male’ in the same way ‘successful’ people of colour are
sometimes labelled ‘white’?
middle-class, for without the “bourgeois practices of her family” (p.51) to support her audacity, she could never have taken such a risk - that of annihilation - in the first place.⁴⁴

Similar problems apply to considerations of race/ethnicity. Caribbeans, Afro-Americans, Latinos (and so on), are considered as having homogeneous cultural characteristics, concerns, and behaviours. Difficulties that they may experience in school are attributed to racism, often without consideration of similar experiences among other student groups (Dei, 1993; McLaren, 1993; Phelan, Yu & Davidson, 1994; Solomon, 1992).

I suggest that this assumption of homogeneity of experience and world view among cultural sub-groups has allowed the complex combinations of various kinds of social capital at the disposal of individuals within social sub-groups to be bypassed in most discussions of student agency, constraint and resistance, as I elaborate later when discussing the work of Chambers (1997).⁴⁵ My contention is that in order to proceed in developing an understanding of the relations between agency, structure and resistance, we have to radically re-examine our current notions concerning them. We need to form new conceptualizations that allow that the subjects of our inquiry - students or others - can and do act as social agents with valid (albeit incomplete) knowledge positions that permit them to rationally reflect upon and explain their own behaviour. Fortunately, glimmers of a different student perspective can also be identified to point us in the right direction.

⁴⁴ Walkerdine’s generalization of a subjectively situated account of British girls’ passive silencing is so at odds with my own experience that I find it particularly irritating. It seems surprising that the patriarchal assumption of female passivity remains unchallenged in much of feminist research into education.
⁴⁵ Community development literature uses a broad definition of social capital that views it as any resource at the disposal of an individual to negotiate their participation and power within society. Some kinds of social capital would be particularly useful to negotiating formal education systems (thus educational capital). This is an issue I take up in my discussion of the study results.
Special Agents.\textsuperscript{46} Glimmers of a Different Student Perspective

Despite the problems noted above, the literature does provide (perhaps often inadvertently) a more complex picture of student agency and resistance within a context of the social constraints imposed by a ‘closed’ (or ‘total’) institution (Goffman, 1961). As my earlier discussion demonstrates, pretty much everyone agrees that constraint is present in the school setting. There is also consensus that oppositional behaviour will occur if not suppressed. Glimpses of student perspectives more complex than the dichotomy of rebelling and dropping out versus passively and uncritically staying in school can be found in both Parsons (1959) and Willis (1977).

Interestingly, Parsons (1959) notes that “indifference” to school performance, as well as “overt revolt” could be a possible form of resistance. He offers a concept of “cross-pressured” students who might be likely to feign indifference as a defence when their school achievement success is at odds with the expectations of their cultural (low-status) backgrounds (p. 447). Parsons devotes precisely one paragraph to the potentially important insight that opportunity/success as well as the lack of it can pose a social risk that creates tension, confusion and resistance.\textsuperscript{47} Close examination of Willis (1977) suggests the presence of a similarly cross-pressured group of students. The ‘lads’ themselves identify a group they perceive as partly resisters and partly conformers (p.15), but once again, although the author notes this, it is not pursued.

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\textsuperscript{46} As noted in the Introduction, students were involved as informants and collaborators throughout this project. Their views were an important component in validating buried contributions in the literature. The use of ‘special agents’ is an unabashed play on the potentially subversive nature of collaboration. Each student collaborator has been assigned an agent number. See Appendix A for the Special Agent Profiles.

\textsuperscript{47} I am unable to find any explicit reference to this important notion of being “cross-pressured” and its possible relation to resistance-conformity in subsequent literature. Arguably the notion is present in Walkerdine (1990), but she does not clearly present herself or her research subjects as “cross-pressured” as Parsons does in a manner that does imply a real choice to be ‘bright’ and to choose to resist educational success anyway.
The ethnographic accounts of Everhart (1983) and McLaren (1993) both provide detailed description of the day-to-day life of students within the constrained setting of school that reveal further interesting complexities around what counts as resistant student behaviour. Before discussing these in detail, however, it is necessary to point out that a mass of evidence from cognitive science, concept-learning, and problem solving, has forced at least superficial acknowledgement that students are actively engaged in the learning process (Eylon & Linn, 1988). This recognition is incorporated in Living and Learning, a 1968 provincial report on educational objectives in Ontario (Hall & Dennis, 1968) that advocated a child-centred approach to education. The concept of the student as an active learning-agent can be found in all subsequent educational reviews and policy documents. It co-exists uneasily within a discourse that continues to simultaneously portray the student (especially the adolescent) as a partial, unreliable, and inevitably incompetent (ill-informed, misguided) agent, in need of the right kind of adult direction regarding both the appropriate social behaviour and knowledge to be learned. Uncomfortably juxtaposed with the already confused concept of the student-agent are current critical views in sociology of education that present a perspective of the student as ‘prisoner’ (Apple, 1990; Contenta, 1993; Corrigan, 1987; Everhart, 1983; Goodson & Dowbiggen, 1990; Richer, 1990; Usher & Edwards, 1994).

Given the context of contradiction in which adolescents must construct their social identity it is not surprising that the picture that surfaces from ethnographic detail is one of complicated individual and collective resistance "rituals" more focused on gaining moment-to-moment control over the environment of captivity, than on changing the over-riding structure of education, let alone the larger world (Everhart, 1983; McLaren, 1993). Everhart (1983) provides a systematic description of daily life in school that (perhaps
inadvertently) transcends the limits of class. His account demonstrates that collective, organized student resistance does take place, and also offers glimpses of overt female resistance. A variety of resistant acts are uncovered, many of which involve an active struggle to contest and reclaim the space and timing of schooling (also emphasized by McLaren, 1993). Much to Everhart’s disappointment, he notes only two attempts at what could be termed resistance by structural engagement (that is attempts aimed at actually changing school rules or programs). The first involved a male student’s attempt to politicize the student council, and the second an attempt by the female president of the student council to complain to the school board about the principal’s control of the student council funds. Both attempts failed and carried a penalty of social embarrassment for the students involved.

Everhart does, however, describe numerous instances of the more subversive kind of resistance directed at moment-to-moment control of the space and time of daily routine, and I have organized these into the following five basic types.

- **Peer socializing as the prime reason for attending school**, in and out of class. This was the students’ declared reason for staying in school, and an activity they put ahead of doing curriculum work.

- **Skipping classes while attending school**. The challenge was to find ways to be in school but avoid curriculum work, thus allowing increased opportunities for peer socialization. It included illegal skipping but involved much more. There were numerous methods of ‘legal’ skipping that provided sanctioned time away from curriculum work (such as joining a club, athletic team, drama production, peer tutoring/mediating, student representation and so on). Everhart observed that

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*Everhart’s definition of “working class” first includes all families who ‘sell labour power and then extends this to include all students, arguing that they are exchanging labour for needed commodities (pp.29-31).*
students sometimes worked together on these ‘chosen’ activities much harder than any class work would have demanded.

- **Extending ‘getting ready’ and ‘waiting time.’** Methods were employed that involved careful collective balance and timing concerning place and duration of acts such as forgetting books, loosing papers, breaking pencils, pretending to need extra time.

- **Resistance by collective action.** This involved the impressive elaborate organization of collective acts intended to ‘bug the teacher.’ Everhart describes instances of collective pencil tapping, gum chewing, and intricate note passing systems, sometimes using blank notes.

- **Resistance by apparent compliance.** This sometimes amounted to actual confrontation by literal compliance. One boy, after an earlier clash with the teacher, was asked to use the words ‘enjoy’ and ‘excitement’ in a sentence. In response, he read out to the class, “I don’t enjoy Mrs Burton’s class and it’s not very exciting” (p.96).

Some theorists (such as Corrigan, 1987; McLaren, 1989, 1993) have argued for the need for a broader conceptualization of resistance that recognizes acts such as those listed above. If resistance is to be viewed as this more subversive opposition to imposed daily routines, then Davies’ (1995b) concern about the validity of incorporating “anything less than joyful compliance” (p.1468) needs to be taken seriously. In an attempt to assess whether or not students recognized the above acts as resistant, I talked to some of my student collaborators about them. On hearing Everhart’s descriptions, Agent #1 immediately described a recent incident in her music class. A message was passed from student to student, by whispering behind hands when the teacher wasn’t looking (the
possibility that he would see seems to have been part of the collective challenge). The message was, “when the big hand is on the four, everyone cough.” Agent #1 was caught whispering to Agent #2, and the teacher (who probably knew from past experience something was afoot) furiously pulled Agent #2’s chair against the wall, demanding to know what had been said. Agent #1 responded that she was just asking if Agent #2 was walking her way after school. The teacher told them not to ‘socialize’ in his class. Everyone still coughed when the big-hand got to four.

Weeks later this incident resulted in an act of ‘resistance by confrontation’ that also heavily underlined the student emphasis on the importance of socializing. The usually high-achieving Agent #1 received a ‘C’ in music on her report card. Apparently incensed by this academic blemish, and still angry at the physical mishandling of Agent #2, she filled out the student comment section of the return slip by identifying as a ‘strength’ her ability to socialize. She then identified “socializing in music” as a ‘concern’, “because [teacher X] yelled at you if you did.” She noted the course of action to take would be to “avoid socializing in music.” The signed slipped was returned to the school.

Agent #1 was much less impressed with a passage from McLaren (1993). Intrigued by the discussion of Everhart, she later picked up Schooling as a Ritual Performance, which fortuitously opened at a statement of a teacher suggesting that such things as not putting up their hands and leaning back in their chairs, were acts of student resistance (p.150). This view evoked howls of derisive laughter and accusations of paranoia from the student-reader. Perhaps under some conditions such acts might become resistant, but the point is the students must intend them as such. Several student collaborators

49 This act of rebellion resulted in the student being transferred into another English section. I wondered why this would be a punishment - unless it was understood to disrupt his established socialization patterns.
50 In all fairness, the problem here may be the way the description of the instance is presented. Reading the passage over, I would say it is possible that the teacher had a sense of deliberate and organized resistance acts such as the ones described in Everhart and by Agent # 1.
also confirmed Everhart’s observation that only some teachers were targeted for this kind of treatment, generally teachers who had earned the students disrespect.

Everhart concludes (and my observations and student collaborator comments are in agreement) that students in school have an elaborate folklore knowledge that they construct within and around the constraints of schooling. They pass this knowledge between classes and cohorts and they come together across their heterogeneous subjectivities in order to engage in collective resistance-acts. For social actors who spend six hours a day as virtual prisoners with few if any rights they remain spirited and innovative, determined to exert whatever agency they can with an understanding that at least they contest the boundaries of their confinement, of their boredom, and of enforced knowledge. They create their own spaces and their own sub-cultures. They actually manage to enjoy the social aspects of schooling, and in Canada, the vast majority do not drop out. This picture of students and schools contests the treasured ideas of resistance theorists and critical pedagogues regarding what “critical consciousness” is and what exercising agency is all about.

There is also increasingly additional evidence from more practice and outcome focused research in education that students “know whereof they speak” (Looker, 1997 p.26). When researchers have engaged children and adolescents in directly discussing their experiences of the social world, rich results have invariably demonstrated that even quite young children have, and can express, a sense of themselves acting upon the world around them (Boutilier, 1994; Dei, 1993; James, 1999; Kelly, 1993; Mehan et al, 1994; Shapiro, 1989; Steedman, 1982; Stratton, 1994; 1996a; Stodolsky, Stalk & Glaessner, 1991; Tesson et al, 1987; 1990). The consensus of opinion is that students are neither dupes nor cultural revolutionaries. Rather, they respond to structural forces by acting to shape and define them in creative ways (Mehan et al, 1994 p. 114). They consciously experience and exercise a sense of agency in making decisions that take
into account the resources they recognize as available to them (Looker, 1997; Stratton, 1996a). They have strategies to resist choices they know are expected of them but with which they don’t agree, and arguments to support their non-conformist preferences (Stratton, 1996a). Furthermore, students’ perceptions about schooling and influences on decisions hold up empirically (Dei, 1993; Looker, 1997). The conclusion is that there are serious gaps in our understanding that we need to fill by asking students directly about their life experiences.

**Towards New Understandings: Some Possibilities for Theoretical Synthesis**

Not only do we have insufficient empirical knowledge of students' experiences, we also lack a viable sociological theory of childhood and adolescence (Tesson, 1988; Tesson & Youniss, 1995). Furthermore, it cannot be said that our theories of agency and resistance as they apply to adult actors are exactly stalwart. I have, however, identified several strands of contemporary social theory that I believe have promise for creating a web of theory strong and flexible enough to accommodate a better understanding of the interrelations of both compliant and resistant actions of human agents and social structures. I suggest that Giddens’ discussion of structuration, Foucault’s notions of governmentality and discursive practices, and Goffman’s theory of social interactions within a total institution can all provide important explanatory contributions. I turn to Chambers (1997) for a discussion of the role of social capital in actors’ formations and negotiations of hierarchies of power within structural relations.52

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51 Many of the criticisms made of sociology of education literature are applicable to other discussions of resistance to structural oppression. For an example with Hamilton factory workers see Archibald (1996). In terms of more general structure and knowledge issues see Dei (1996) and Livingstone & Sawchuck (2000).

52 I am not suggesting that these are the only useful strands of theory that might be applied. In particular some Canadian authors (Andres, 1993; 1997; Taylor, 2002) applied Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital and “habitus” (1977, 1999) to considerations of students’ agency in life.
The Contributions and Limitations of “Structuration”

In an attempt to address lingering conceptualizations of structure-agency as a duality, Giddens (1978) advanced the notion of “structuration.” His position involves viewing social structure as systems of interaction which depend on various “modes of structuration” to ensure they are maintained (reproduced). Integral to the maintenance of these systems is an exchange of “mutual knowledge.” Different groups and/or sets of social actions may construct different sets of meanings based on shared moral understandings. Thus, the reproduction of the structures of domination ultimately rests on the daily acts of individuals and there will be struggles over what is to ‘count’ in terms of interaction.

Giddens makes several strong arguments that suggest the notion of structuration might provide an epistemological framework within which to conduct a sociological inquiry into the relationships between agency, constraint and resistance in formal educational settings. First, he is concerned with exploring the nature of action; second, he argues that structure is itself a duality that is both constraining and enabling (rather an important consideration when examining education); and third, his emphasis on the construction, maintenance, and reproduction of structures through the daily, mediated interactions of actors is clearly relevant. For Giddens, the series of mediated connections involved in the reproduction of structure provide the hope for social change - the acts of agents can change, therefore so can the structural practices.⁵³

trajectories. Others have criticized Bourdieu’s theories as structurally deterministic (Davies, 1995b). Perhaps due to the bias of my own social background and educational experiences, I tend to agree with the critics. As already stated, I have adopted the more community based definition and application of social capital, and I do not dismiss Bourdieu’s concept of habitus as a potential component in a synthesis of theory to better understanding student choices. My focus in this thesis however, is on students’ deliberate struggles for agency against the constraints of the system and I have selected the strands of theory I find most helpful in that regard.

⁵³ This position is also compatible with post-Marxist and many New Social Movement positions, which argue for multiple sites of struggle and contested terrain, material, ideological and psychological.
Giddens further argues that there are five related but inadequately addressed issues in the debate about agency-structure relatedness (1976 p.71):

1. *The formulation of the concept of action or agency* - or when is an act agency?

2. *The connection between the concept of action and that of intention of purpose* - if the outcome is unintentional, did the actor exercise agency?

3. *The characterization of types of acts* - how do we identify acts in terms of what is happening (issues of types of knowledge that apply to differences between ‘lay’ and ‘academic’)?

4. *The significance of reasons and motives in relation to agency* - this extends points two and three in considering the knowledge of the actor and the recognition of the observer/interactor, in forming rationalizations and justifications for acts.

5. *The nature of communicative acts* - including intended non-verbal communication. An act that is intended to pass information cannot take place in isolation.

These points are all directly relevant to my earlier consideration of what might or might not be considered a resistant act. As Giddens recognized, problematic philosophical debates surround any definitive resolution of the five identified issues and his conclusions are by no means concrete and clear-cut. He argues, however, that the concepts of action and act-identification do not necessarily have anything to do with intentions. Further, actors constantly monitor their actions on an essentially reflexive basis. They are not consciously aware of thinking about their actions but they can explain, rationalize and justify those acts if required, and do so according to the level of the inquirer’s prior knowledge. Similarly, the inquirer always brings to the interaction a set of previously acquired knowledge on which to draw in interpreting the act. Given this, Giddens considers that the issue of determining the exact “consciousness” behind a
purposeful action is not particularly useful. It is, he contends, not possible to act without some kind of intent. All results of an action may not have been intended (and presumably the intended outcome may not actually occur). This does not negate the deliberate attempt to exercise agency provided, a) a person could have acted otherwise, and b) the future is not pre-determined (1978 p.75).

The above two criteria of agency are not unproblematic. Although most of the time, to some degree, a person does have a choice between more than one course of action, these are often not equal choices, a problem Giddens does not satisfactorily address. Furthermore, whose perception of the situation determines whether or not the actor had a choice? The issue of the future being pre-determined is even more difficult. The future is almost never 100% pre-determined, so is this a question of perception or probability? Does it mean that if the actor has a choice of acts, but none will make a difference to that which s/he acts upon, then no matter the intent of the act, it is not agency? The last possibility is highly problematic for a consideration of student agency and resistance; however, this interpretation, while it must be considered a possibility, seems at odds with Giddens’ overall intent to maximize, not minimize, the possibilities of acting purposively as an agent. Speaking further to this issue he states:

Purposive conduct involves the application of 'knowledge' so as to produce a particular outcome or series of outcomes....But only in rare circumstances does a person have a clear cut' end' in mind which organizes his energies unequivocally in one direction....To enquire into an actor’s purposes for what he does is to enquire into what ways or from what aspects he is monitoring his involvement in the course of events in so far as he is subordinating them to his agency (1976 pp.81-82).

In that case, we don’t have to fully understand what we are doing, or all the possible ramifications of our acts, in order to be exercising our agency, we merely have to intend to act on an event in an attempt to subordinate it to our will. This would render the acts of Willis’ (1977) “lads” and Everhart’s (1983) students as indisputable acts of agency that sought the subordination, no matter how temporarily, of the constraining structure to the
agent’s will. In the case of Willis’ “lads” this position makes it seem somewhat unfair to hold their agency acts as directly responsible for reproducing their cultural subordination. They chose short-term gain over long-term risk, but it is not clear that staying unresistingly in school would have made any substantial difference in that regard.54

In terms of a consideration of student agency, Giddens’ fifth point regarding communicative action seems important as it underlines the consciousness required by students to act collectively in school in ways which challenge the structural constraints. Small acts like collective pencil tapping, coughing, and note passing, take on a different degree of importance when we consider the complex interactions of agents involved in bringing about events that disrupt structural routines. Also required is a shared consciousness that allows both students and teachers to understand these acts as resistant.

A problematic question remains to be asked, however: to what extent does Giddens’ notion of structuration actually resolve the problem of dominant social structure being external, oppositional and constraining to the manifestation of individual agency? To answer this I offer another piece of Giddens’ own argument. He insists that structuration also has important ramifications for developing useful sociological concepts. Social scientists must first understand their inquiry in terms of the lay concepts they wish to study. Conceptualizations that are incomprehensible to the ordinary person, or at odds with their understanding of the social world, will not produce useful social science. Applying this measuring rod to a view of structures as merely systems of interactions, the lay person is quite capable of recognizing that people (collections of individuals) maintain social structures by acting within them. The factory worker understands her/his role in both the factory and the industry, but that is entirely different

54 We don’t really know the answer to this, because of Willis’ inattention to the majority of working class boys, but there are some indications in his account that most of the lads got
to suggesting that the industry has no overriding structure that extends beyond any individual actor or set of interpersonal interactions. The ordinary person also can, and does, perceive social structures (especially large companies and state controlled institutions) as being entities separate from any individual, or groups of actors that maintain them (e.g., striking workers can be replaced). Perhaps in a ‘pure’ theoretical sense this lay view of the world is ‘wrong’, but it exists for a very good reason - different agents have different degrees of power, and the acts of the ones who own and control the operations of social structures have considerably more power than those of the workers who they direct. Giddens does not deny this, nor does he adequately address the problems the hierarchical power of agents possesses for the complete resolution of a structure/agency duality. His argument is that the interaction system of the structure provides enabling opportunities for emancipation, along with the constraints it imposes on agency. But what if the constraints far outweigh the enabling qualities and serve to prevent any action for effective progressive change?

"Someone Has Said": The Challenge From Foucault

Foucault shares with Giddens the view that social structure and ideological control are maintained via interactions that occur within plural systems: power is dispersed: there is no macro-micro dichotomy (Foucault, 1980. Whereas Giddens focuses his discussion on the interactions of social actors, Foucault is concerned with the conditions of the discursive practices in which discoursing subjects may take part. His intent is to challenge theorizing that reifies the consciousness of individual social agents as the road to immanent social emancipation (Foucault, 1991). He argues that since the 18th century, social discipline and power are maintained through the practices of 'governmentality.' The administrative state exercises a form of power recognized as apprenticeships anyway, pretty much what the school conformers were hoping for.
‘government’ and manifest through a series of governmental apparatus and *savoirs* (essentially, things to know or official knowledge sets). This state of governmentality has become so overriding that:

> techniques of government have become the only political issue, the only real space for political struggle and contestation…it is the tactics of the government which make possible the continual definition and redefinition of what is within the competence of the state and what is not, the public versus the private and so on (1991 p103).

Foucault (1991) sees ‘discursive formation’ as a dynamic process that, depending on the conditions, accommodates changes to form and content of governing discourses. Changes can involve alterations to previous boundaries, the roles and positions of the speaking subjects, the meaning and application of the language used, and the localization and circulation of the particular discourse (pp.56-57). Thus, in any given time and place there are a set of rules that govern all discourses that can occur. The rules determine what may (or may not) be said; in what ways and circumstances utterances can occur; what validity is ascribed to these utterances; which will be retained and carried forward; and which individuals have access to what discourses (pp.59-61).

Foucault’s argument about the role of discursive practices in the maintenance of government and control of knowledge is clearly applicable to a discussion of the structures, content, and practices of formal education and has been widely applied in that regard (Goodson & Dowbiggin, 1990; Usher & Edwards, 1994). Additionally, it is both highly relevant to my consideration in Chapter Two of the discourses of educational policy and reform, and equally problematic for my consideration of student (or any other individual) agency. Foucault successfully dislodges the hope for emancipative social change via the reified consciousness of the individual actor, but then struggles under the weight of the complex web of discursive practices he has evoked instead. Despite the

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55 Michel Foucault (1991), "Politics and the Study of Discourse" (p. 72), in Burchell and Grahem
dynamic nature of these practices, when challenged, Foucault is hard pressed to refute the accusation that his theory removes “all basis for a progressive political intervention” (Foucault 1991 p. 53). Indeed, as I noted earlier the concept of the docile body seems to reduce students just as thoroughly to helpless dupes as did earlier structural Marxist arguments. That is not to say Foucault’s views are necessarily alien to all students. As Agent #3 responded when asked what school was about: “education [is] about knowledge...knowledge is power; power corrupts; therefore my school is evil”

While some have concluded that Foucault has erected a form of Weberian iron cage (Dingwell, 1997), others interpret the implications of Foucault’s work more positively. For some social movement and community development theorists (Chambers, 1999; Melucci, 1989, Rao, Stuart, & Kelleher, 1999) the dynamic nature of the shifting terrain of the geopolitical tactics and strategies of discourse-ruled governmentality serves to, a) disperse the location of power and, b) inevitably lead to discursive tensions and contradictions that can be seized as opportunities to bring about change. In this view, it is the concluding utterance of Foucault (1991) about his own work that is of key importance: “what matter who is speaking; someone has said: what matter who is speaking” (p.72, emphasis added). In this interpretation it is the insertion of the new and critical question into the governing discourse that is the vehicle of progressive political change. Through the cracks that emerge in previously accepted discourse, new knowledge views can enter. Although there is an ever-present danger that any alternative discourse will be marginalized from, or co-opted by, dominant

(Eds.). *The Foucault Effect.*

56 Personally, I am of the view that Foucault’s work has been rather over-applied, often without recognition of the many other theorists about whose work Foucault (in European tradition) assumes the reader has prior knowledge. Furthermore, much application of Foucault ignores his personal objection to being categorized and his sense of both the potential weight and ultimate incompleteness and fragility of his own thought. As he remarks In reflecting on his own writing,” it is quite possible that you have killed God under the weight of all that you have said; but do not think that you will make, from all that you are saying, a man who will live longer than he.” (1993 p.72.).
practices, once voiced, the critical question can for evermore potentially be evoked. Counter discourses can be formed and re-formed just as dominant discourses are, and the latter is forced to respond and adjust. This constant struggle over political terrain rings true to those on the action end of attempting to bring about social change while their very engagement in this activity simultaneously challenges the diminished role of individual actors in the process.

**Returning the Physical Presence of Structure: The Addition of Goffman**

Before returning to the struggles of social actors either with each other or with the ruling discourse, I think it is necessary to point out that both the trappings of structuration and governmentality take up physical space. Government is much given, in fact, to the erecting of distinctive physical structures. Thus, no matter the degree of mental control involved in the social order, like it or not, structure does have a physical as well as symbolic presence. Those who fail to appear sufficiently docile risk becoming physically constrained within one of these imposing structures. In my opinion, the work of Goffman (1961, 1983) concerning the interaction order within constrained and power-marked social settings has been greatly overlooked.

As noted earlier, some recent sociology of education theorizing reflects an engagement with the concept of students as inmates "doing time" in a prison-like institution (Apple, 1990; Corrigan, 1987; McLaren, 1993; Usher & Edwards, 1994). These theorists turn primarily to Foucault (1980, 1991) to support a consideration of the subjugated bodies and intellectual subjectivities of students in relation to the physical discipline and discourse-generated control of the spaces that they are forced to inhabit, but they do not engage with Goffman’s description of the characteristics of the ‘total’ institution. Goffman (1961) included the boarding school in his examples of total

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57 Both Apple (1990 p.136) and McLaren (1993 p.191) note (but do not develop) the relevance of Goffman’s description to a consideration of the structures and practices of education.
institutions, but excluded the day school as the students regularly left its confines. He also notes, however, that none of the conditions he describes are exclusive to total institutions, and that no total institution has every single attribute he records – he is discussing an “ideal type.” In fact, if leaving at the end of the day is set aside, I would argue the degree to which the organization and operation of a day school ‘fits’ the elements of Goffman’s total (or 'closed') institution is, in fact eerily striking.  

Goffman’s contention is that the elements of the total institution (1961 pp. 3-124) impact the social interaction that take place within the institution and between the institution and the larger social world. In his later work (Goffman, 1988) he suggests that this patterning of hierarchical power relations among social actors (the interaction order) is the key to forging much needed links between macro and micro sociological theorizing. I further suggest that conditions of the closed institution have implications for the conduct of all research within such an institution (a matter I shall take up in Chapter Three).

According to Goffman, a closed institution purports to do one or more of the three following things: enable an instrumental task; protect the inmates; protect the community. Sociology of education literature contains arguments that the mass schooling serves any or all of these purposes. Following is a summary of the main

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58 Goffman notes that Etzioni (1957) describes educational institutions as both ‘total’ and ‘closed.’ I prefer the term ‘closed’ (and use it hereafter) as I would argue that no institution is really ‘total.’ Staff come and go, some visitors are admitted, and most inmates eventually leave the prison. If the concept of closed is taken to apply to institutions where access (and/or departure) are constrained and conditional then the range of relevant institutions is greatly increased, and I think this is generally important for a consideration of structure-agency interrelations. Furthermore, when Foucault’s arguments about discursive control are introduced, the degree to which the student-inmates are ‘free’ from institutional impositions merely because they leave the physical structure of the school becomes highly debatable. Discussions of policy and reform discourse in chapter two serve to illustrate this point, as do later considerations of the degree to which these official discourses are reflected in the students’ own discussions of schooling.

59 Goffman knew that he was dying when he wrote “The Interaction Order” a speech that was delivered posthumously at the American Sociological Association Meeting in 1983. In it he comments that he must leave it to others to work out the exact details of the macro-micro links to
elements of the closed institution that impact the conditions of social interaction among social agents within the institution. I have placed an emphasis on words that reflect issues and conditions raised in my earlier discussion of the sociology of education literature. Several of the latter points are particularly relevant to conditions and issues described in Chapter Three.

- All phases of daily activities are tightly scheduled, proceed at pre-arranged times, and are enforced from above by a system of explicit formal rulings and a body of officials (p.6).
- All daily activities take place in the “immediate company of a large batch of others’ (p.6), who are treated as a homogeneous group and required to do the same things, under the same authority structure.
- There is a basic status-split between the large managed group (inmates) and the proportionally small supervisory staff, with each status tending to view the other “in terms of narrow, hostile stereotypes” (p.7).
- The ‘inmates’ are moved in blocks by the staff personnel whose chief activity (it can be argued) is surveillance rather than guidance (regardless of official policy rhetoric).
- Talk across the status boundaries has a special tone and mobility between these two statuses is either forbidden or highly restricted (e.g., staff must be formally addressed whereas they address inmates informally or even disparagingly; so called discussions are inevitably oppositional).
- The inmate is not regarded as a complete/competent social actor/agent, and this view is systematically reinforced by institutional practices that are intended to create in the inmates this psychological view of themselves (e.g., Inmates are which he points. I think it is most unfortunate there has been so little subsequent engagement with his work.
excluded from the process of decisions regarding their fate; lockers are searched; property confiscated; clothing prescribed; permission must be asked to meet basic physical needs).

• Inmates develop a subversive counter-culture that involves some degree of solidarity which may support brief mass defiance, but more often involves subtler forms of non-compliance and disruption.

• Within the inmate culture, individuals adopt different cognitive strategies to cope with the institutional power and these run the span between flagrant rebellion and total “conversion.”

• Physical barriers exist to prevent inmates exiting, and outsiders entering, the institution at will (e.g., locked doors, surveillance cameras, guards, a system of passes to monitor permitted exceptions; censoring verbal and written communications).

• Outsiders pose a potential threat to the institution. They are an often unwelcome reminder that the ‘closed’ institution is still connected to a wider social structure to which it is subordinate and accountable. Allowed to interact without sufficient initiation and/or supervision, visitors may breach institutional etiquette (staff or inmate, official or unofficial) and they may ask embarrassing questions. Therefore, interaction of outsiders with visitors (even when they have official status) is discouraged.

• The movements of visitors who do gain access are generally highly controlled. Most often they are invited to special institutional ceremonies and displays where “pet inmates” (103) act as receptionists and mass compliance is maintained by ensuring the conditions of the event are more desirable than ordinary routine
(e.g., plays; motivational speakers; community fairs; even showcases of creative achievements in visitor reception areas).

At least to some degree, the conditions described above all apply to the operational conditions of public school in Canada. As Goffman amplifies and draws out in his discussion, these elements also contain tensions and contradictions that can be utilized as “cracks in the wall” to gain entry to the institution and to the inmates. They can also be used by the inmates to “reserve something of oneself from the clutch of an institution” (1961 p.319), although such action is ‘risky’ as the penalty can be high if acts are perceived as resistance by those in power.

Despite a focus on micro interactions, the awful weight of structure is as palpable in Goffman as it is Foucault. He does not offer us a way out of the asylum, but he does suggest a different concept of the social agent:

Perhaps we should further complicate the construct...initially defining the individual, for sociological purposes, as a stance-taking entity, a something that takes up a position somewhere between identification with an organization and opposition to it...ready at the slightest pressure to gain its balance by shifting its involvement in either direction. It is thus against something that the self can emerge (1961 p.320).

So for Goffman, the social structure is dehumanizing, resistance is dangerous, and escape may be impossible. Nevertheless, through the struggle against total constraint, even while within our prisons, we may achieve “utter self possession” (p.318).

‘Uppers’ and ‘Lowers’: Complex Power Hierarchies Among Social Agents

One of the contributions made by Goffman is his focus on the rich interplay of social actors who have different degrees of social power. Similar acts have different outcomes dependant on various interactions between the social context and the social status of the actor. For example, friends and family can condemn an actor to the asylum, or protect him/her from it, and some inmates find ways to gain power over others on the inside. Goffman’s social agents closely resemble the innovative students of Everhart’s
ethnography who have neither perfectly raised consciousness, nor are puppets of dominating discourses or other modes of social control. These social agents are actively engaged in negotiating dangerous terrain in a social world marked by a complexity of power hierarchies. As Chambers (1997) points out, it is not just a question of dominant and subordinate social groups; there are always ‘uppers and ‘lowers’ within, as well as between, every social group. The social capital (or lack thereof) associated with being an upper or lower is multiple and accumulative. Deep poverty is multifaceted deprivation and vulnerability, but even among the poor the experience is relative—there are upper poor people. These always present and constantly reconstructed divisions of power must be recognized and constantly challenged.

Chambers’ (1999) theory of hierarchies of social power is part of an argument for a new paradigm of community development practice. He also challenges the superiority of what uppers count as knowledge and learning, suggesting their privileged status becomes a disability that prevents them from both understanding the realities of poverty and recognizing “that the system is a prison for them too” (p.222). He argues the necessity of confronting everything about professional training designed to make its recipients insular to such understanding by adopting bottom up approaches to learning that acknowledge that both uppers and lowers need to “learn how to learn” (p.102). The most powerful possibility for real movement toward equitable societies, he concludes, is “changing the way we treat children” (p.233). Chamber’s contentions have implications for considerations of agency and resistance within educational structures. First, he

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60 A number of social constructionist discussions of education apply Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital. The notion of social capital employed by Chambers (1997) and others in a discussion of community development seems broader and incorporates whatever is socially useful to an individual and a community. It is perhaps closer to Coleman’s (1988) notion (see Stolle & Lewis (forthcoming). An important distinction is that Bourdieu’s concept is structural while Coleman’s concept stresses the ability of individuals to act to collect and utilize social capital. This occurs via individual interactions, which may lead to collectivities and collective agency, but not necessarily.

confronts the self-perceptions of critical pedagogues concerning their ability to know and to learn. Second, he challenges the way all adults treat (and thus teach) children. Third, an extrapolation of his arguments about complex power hierarchies raises questions about the organization of resistance among students. Which students have the power to organize resistance and which can participate? Who or what is weak enough to become the target of the resistant act?

Finding the Common Ground

There are many differences and probably irreconcilable tensions between and within the theories of Giddens, Foucault, Goffman, and Chambers, but there is also some common ground. All agree that there are systems of social structure that operate according to sets of established rules. The systems are concerned with upholding established patterns of power relations and the rules are generally intended to train and regulate social behaviour. System maintenance ultimately relies upon the interactions of individuals and, therefore, tensions and cracks inevitably appear. These disjunctures may provoke challenge and ultimately change to occur. The most notable differences among the theories is the positioning of the individuals’ enactment of social agency and the treatment of power hierarchies among social agents. In summary, Giddens provides a way to pose questions and analyse answers using the knowledge that really counts—that by which actors live their daily lives and interact with other actors. Foucault essentially disagrees with the neo-Marxist focus on the individual as an agent of progressive social change, but nevertheless contributes a complementary view of the role of official (government) discourses in regulating both structural and individual interactions. Neither Giddens nor Foucault, however, confront the problem of power hierarchies among individuals interacting within systems and discursive practices. The notion that raising the consciousness of individuals will be emancipatory may be
unrealistically utopian, but conjuring away the reality of individuals wielding dictatorial amounts of power is equally unrealistic.

Goffman’s work helps address this gap by confronting the layers of power involved in constrained social action and the maintenance of controlling institutions. He demonstrates that individuals strive to retain a sense of themselves as acting on even the most oppressive social contexts in order to preserve themselves from absolute domination. He does not, however, provide a theory of social change. As a practitioner devoted to bringing about progressive change, Chambers brings together the permutations of social power hierarchies in a way that also confronts the knowledge assumptions of the privileged. Social agents, uppers and lowers, may simultaneously challenge and collude with systems of oppression. Such a complication of ‘realities’ and contradictory views and actions may mean working on “the edge of chaos” to meet the challenge of engaging in an “incrementalism of positive interactions” to make intelligible that which is obscured (pp. 214-222).62 There is no utopian solution, just an unending struggle to expose each and every facet of institutionalized oppression, one small step at a time.

Taken together, these strands of theoretical thought, along with threads of empirical evidence, suggest complex relations between the agency of students (and others) and the structures of education. The system of education can be experienced as both socially enabling and constraining, sometimes simultaneously. Negotiating the system requires intricate (and perhaps convoluted) tactics and strategies, some of which entail compliance, others resistance.

62 Chambers is specifically critiquing post-modern scholarship which he considers an affectation and “thought disorder” (p.222)
I am suggesting that these strands of theory can contribute to a web within which we may better understand students' personal experience of school. As noted in the Introduction, the base research questions for this study ask:

What do young adolescents entering high school think about the educational system that legally compels their attendance for a minimum of ten years? What awareness do they have of the policies that, directly or indirectly, define or influence their educational development? How do they experience the important transitions from elementary to high school, and high school to the adult world? How do they explain their educational choices and future aspirations? How adequately do they consider the education they are receiving is preparing them for the adult social and economic worlds?

Once a critical gaze is turned on our current knowledge of these matters, attempts to answer these questions must inevitably raise more nuanced sub-questions for theoretical, epistemological and practical consideration. The theoretical arguments of Foucault and Goffman suggest that it is probably unreasonable to expect students to see far beyond the conditions of their daily confinement. Students' accounts of schooling may be mostly focused on the daily areas of the school and the micro level experience of policies and dominant discourses. Certainly, previous research has not demonstrated that students consider the macro-level components of educational policy formation, or its role in constructing their social positions and personal goals. On the other hand, researchers have not directly asked students if they have views on these matters and there are alternative possibilities to consider.

Given the Ontario climate of school reform in which this dissertation research took place, would it not be difficult for students to retain a world-view entirely uninfluenced by these matters? When adolescents must work hard against cultural assumptions in order to construct a view of themselves as active social agents, does success require some repression of consciousness concerning the actual degree of structural imposition under which they struggle? Does heightened consciousness of structural practices actually confer more effective agency in changing the practices of
schooling than is afforded to the student who knows only that s/he hates school, refuses to work, and takes every opportunity to be disruptive, just because she hates school? How do some students resist and achieve in school while others resist and fail (drop out)? It is well established that social status influences educational outcomes, most of the time, but how do students actually apply this kind of second-hand capital to their everyday negotiations of “getting an education”? The views the students offer, based on their own experience and reflection as they enter and exit a system “on the edge of chaos,” will be the measure of the discussions and questions raised within this chapter.

In the first part of this chapter I pointed to embedded constructions and assumptions about adolescents: risk, incompetent social agency, and the homogeneity of subordinate groups within the sociology of education literature. In Chapter Two I examine the incorporation of these themes into the discourse of Ontario educational policy and reform initiatives historically and currently. I also show how these assumptions are extended to constructions about parents and teachers as they are associated with students in a discourse of shifted social and educational responsibility.
CHAPTER TWO

Re-forming the Front-line of Education in Ontario: Confusing Discourses of Chaos and Cohesion, Partnerships and Failed Responsibilities

The main purpose of this chapter is to provide a snapshot of the social context in which Ontario high school students were “getting an education” during the period of this dissertation research (1996 to 2002). As noted in the Introduction, taking a social constructionist approach to research poses major practical challenges. In an attempt to meet this challenge I have turned to available texts of official and alternative discourses (primarily those of the Ministry of Education, school boards, School councils and mass media). During this process I identified important thematic aspects of the discourse surrounding educational policy and reform. An associated purpose of this chapter is, therefore, to demonstrate that the themes discussed in Chapter One are also present in reform reports, policy documents and other related discourse. Further, I argue that the texts of educational policy (along with the reports that inform and publicize that policy) are instruments of power that stratify students, parents and teachers in particular ways in relation to the educational process, and in relation to each other. An ever-related, teacher-student-parent triad of educational partners is continually positioned and repositioned within the discourses of educational policy and reform.

I begin this chapter with a brief explanation of my approach to representing the social context in which the students in my study received their high school education. I

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63 The actual field research was conducted during the 1998/1999 school year. The high school students who took part in the study, as well as the preparation for, and completion of the project, were, and continue to be affected by educational reforms suggested, implemented and enforced between 1996 and 2003 (the year the ‘double cohort’ graduated). I tracked these reforms for the purposes of this Chapter until 2002.

64 Bégin and Caplan (1994) and the Ontario Ministry of Education (ME) mostly uses the term ‘partners in education.’ Partnership suggests a level playing field of participation that does not exist within the relations of the education system. I prefer the term ‘stakeholders’, as all the
move to a discussion of the context of educational reform in Ontario, identifying dominant elements and historic themes of the surrounding discourse. Turning primarily to the period of reform contiguous to this study, I point to the presence of the assumptions of dominant knowledge as preferable, partial and incompetent (risky) social agency, and homogeneity among sub-groups (introduced in Chapter One). I discuss the way these are used within the OD to construct and reconstruct a teacher-student-parent triad that carries the front-line of responsibility for educational success and failure. I argue that the degree to which members of this triad recognize, accept or reject their 'official' positioning provides an excellent reflection of the day-to-day contested, complex and shifting relations of structure and agency within the education system.65

**Telling the Social Context of the Story:**66 *The Social Constructionist Conundrum*

The social constructionist position maintains that the knowledge a person holds and uses to inform decisions about actions taken cannot be separated from the social milieu in which those actions take place. The practical reality is, however, that it is extremely difficult (probably impossible) that an individual study can adequately research both actors' explanations of their social actions and the macro and meso social settings in which these take place. This presents a conundrum – a gap between the ideals of theory and the possibilities of practice which needs to be acknowledged and addressed, albeit imperfectly. The approach I take in this chapter is the best possible I could evolve within the context of this dissertation research. While it succeeds as a representation of

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65 The focus here is on students negotiating high school, but I would suggest that elements of this discussion would have potential relevance to a consideration of the relations of structure and agency in any hierarchical system.

the structural context of education experienced by the students in this study, it cannot adequately represent the entire economic, political and social milieu of these students, and it is clearly impossible for any one dissertation to do so.

I have chosen to use textual representations of educational discourse because it is an established position within the sociology of knowledge that official texts (commissioned reports, policy documents, media releases etc.) both reflect and reinforce the dominant discourse emanating from those who wield most social power. Using such documents offers a manageable and verifiable way to illustrate the discourse surrounding the educational experiences of the students in the study. As will be seen in this chapter, the OD about education (hereafter denoted as the OD) is concerned with creating both economic and social competency, and as such can arguably be seen as also reflecting the general economic, moral and political social climate.

Official policy texts are, however, seldom read by the average person. The knowledge most of us gain about the content of these documents is usually filtered, primarily through the mass media, and secondarily by third hand accounts from family and friends (and in the case of students, their teachers). For that reason, I also monitored local newspaper reports and electronically available texts of the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) and the Ottawa-Carleton Association of School

67 I adopt as a working definition of ‘discourse’ and its textual representation that offered by Harp (1993 p.1): “By discourse I refer to a system of interpreting the world, including assumptions about legitimate sources of knowledge and authority, specific normative contours and consensus regarding the nature of the social world including possibilities for improvement. By text I refer to a partial representation of discourse, as well as any discursive formation sanctioning particular patterns of speaking, writing and analyzing.”

68 Exhaustively monitoring all forms of mass media, or even all daily newspapers was obviously not possible in the context of this study. Nor would such a rigorous approach reflect the way in which students, teachers and parents interact with mass media. The Ottawa Citizen, as the local paper with the largest circulation and the one most likely to be found in school libraries and guidance offices, was selected for daily reading and filing of all articles on Ontario education (including editorials and letters to the editor) between January 1996 and December 2000. After that time only certain relevant issues were noted. Other media coverage is referred to only if it became incorporated into the textual discourse of the OCDSB or OCASC. See Appendix A for a list of all abbreviated sources cited in this chapter.
Councils (OCASC). Between 1996 and 2000 I was an active member of a local school council (SC) and several associated committees. My observation notes and minutes from various meetings provide additional data for the discussions in this chapter.

**The Context of Educational Reform: Examining the Discourse**

The title to this chapter suggests that I am about to discuss multiple and competing discourses about education and reform and this indeed so. In the paragraphs above, however, I have referred to a dominating OD. The first question to address, then, is whether there actually is a clear, cohesive, and recognizable ‘official’ discourse about education. It is widely accepted that there is a consistent and identifiable basic and officially endorsed discourse about formal education (Apple, 1993; Harp, 1993; Wotherspoon, 1998). It is further argued that this discourse consists mainly of ideologically and socially constructed rhetoric containing internal tensions that provoke considerable disagreement leading to competing associated discourses (Wotherspoon, 1998).

Wotherspoon (1998) points out that as the core aims of education are to produce new knowledge and transform/modify individuals and social conditions, it is by its nature oriented to change. Although this is generally acknowledged, there is considerable disagreement about the kind, content and organization of that change. Critical sociological analysts agree that educational reform initiatives are driven by

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69 Amalgamation of local school boards was one of the reform initiatives taking place during the conduct of this study. The OCDSB previously consisted of two separate Boards, the Ottawa and the Carleton boards of Education (OBE, CBE). Similarly OCASC was formed from the joint parent councils of the two separate Boards. For a full list of documentation abbreviations see Appendix A.

70 My participant observer status was made clear to all members of the school council and to any students with whom I had dealings as a parent representative. The school at which I participated was not one of the sites at which data were collected. However, some students from this school were collaborators in the development and dissemination stages of the study.
groups that have distinct and differing social agendas that tend to be dominated by capitalist market and government (state) fiscal considerations (Apple, 1993; Curtis, Livingstone & Smaller, 1992; Harp, 1993; Wotherspoon, 1998). A discourse of economic, moral and educational crisis is used to drive agendas for educational reforms, which Harp (1993) argues, revolve around issues related to fiscal, knowledge, and governance management that are frequently conflated within the discourse of crisis. He suggests that there are three main areas of alternative discourse: 1) the corporate view that is concerned with generating the workplace skills necessary for market competitiveness; 2) the critical view that is concerned with identifying and addressing social inequalities; and 3) the state view that generally adopts the corporate view but must also be concerned with social accountability and legitimation.

Even Bégin and Caplan (1994), authors of the most recent Ontario Royal Commission on education, acknowledge the “limitations that constrain the possibilities of real change” (p.1.2). They point to the vast bureaucratic structure of the education system, always slow to shift direction; conflicting pressures from “countless stakeholders” (p.1.3); fiscal priorities; ever-present oppositional philosophies of education (p.1.15); and, the socio-political “mood of the moment” (p.1.24). They conclude that suggestions for reform and efforts at change generally result in most things staying more-or-less the same.71

All of the above observations and arguments are compatible with Foucault’s (1991) theory of governmentality presented in Chapter One. What is said (reported, presented) provides a base for debate and critical assessment. Alternative discourses arise which may be complementary or oppositional to the dominant discourse and agenda. Governments and their agents respond by attempting to maintain the status quo through a process of continual definition and re-definition of the key elements that
control the amount and direction of change in order to maintain and legitimate the primary agenda. As part of this process of re-definition, those who attempt to advance strong opposition will often find there is a negative social penalty. So, as Goffman (1961) argues, most individuals prefer to take a position of safe middle ground weighing the relative costs of resistance or compliance rather carefully.

My review and analysis of Ontario educational policy and reform between 1950 and 2000 supports the general directions of these contentions. Certainly the three elements of fiscal, knowledge, and government management are present, often conflated and offered within a construction of social danger and risk. It is my observation, however, that the fiscal discourse is often less overt. It is, of course, present in the discussions of economic competency (fiscal doom will result if public education does not produce competent workers), but communication concerning the actual cost of the education system is usually more tentative and covert. As will be seen in the later discussion of the current reform period, a government discourse that begins with a declared agenda to cut education funding can become very problematic to maintain and manage. More often the fiscal agenda is a sub-text that comes between the recommendations of independently commissioned reports and the actual government polices that result.72

My focus in this chapter is primarily on the present period of reform, but it is important to identify the historic consistency of elements offered in the OD, and the recurrent nature of the issues around which disagreement and alternative discourses...
arise. Although the OD is continually present, and some form of tinkering with the mass education system in Ontario appears to be the norm, for the purpose of historic overview I draw on five major reports and associated policy periods between 1950 and 2000: two Ontario Royal Commissions (Hope, 1950; Bégin & Caplan, 1994); John Robarts’ *Reorganized Programme of Studies* (1961); the Provincial Committee report of Hall and Dennis (1968); and, the *Ontario Study of the Relevance of Education, and the Issue of Dropouts* (Radwanski, 1987).

As previously noted, public education is dually concerned with economic competence and social morality. As there is an underlying assumption in western cultures that one must be economically competent in order to be considered socially moral, these two elements of the discourse are, in fact, inseparable. Nevertheless, the emphasis on the economic or moral components tends to shift according to the political stripe and most pressing concerns of any given historic period. Further, in some way or other, the discourse of social morality must address the issue of disadvantage and inequality among those who are to be educated. The 1950 Ontario Royal Commission was formed (as Hope puts it) as the world was emerging from war into peace and at such a time “man naturally turns to education wherein lies his greatest hope for the realization of his ideals” (Hope, 1950 p.3). The commission made no apology for focusing first on “moral training” that could offset “the evil that sharp intellects, unsupported by moral foundations, have wrought in recent years” (p.27). This was,

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73 In a comprehensive paper that informed this chapter (Stratton, 1996) I discuss key Ontario education policy reports and documents between 1950-2000 in more detail. Others provide critical reviews of part of this period (Curtis et al, 1992; Stamp, 1982) and historic work by Curtis, among others, indicates that the discourse of crisis, focus on, and conflation of fiscal, governance, and particular knowledge issues has existed since the inception of formal public education in Canada (e.g., Curtis, 1997). Work by Wotherspoon (1995, 1998) suggests that these observations are generalizable across Canada and probably at least similar in all highly developed countries with mass public education systems.
however, a period of rapid technological change and the report is also concerned with vocational competence.

The Hope Commission made many, often controversial (and not always very coherent), recommendations for sweeping change to fiscal, governance, and knowledge organization of schooling. Controversial issues included recommending one secular public system operating only in English, de-centralization of governance, organized school districts, and local tax base funding. Concerning the knowledge aspects of education, the report offers nine educational aims, which resonate strongly within the subsequent reports and policy discourse (Hope, 1950 pp.36-40):

A. The capacity to apprehend and practice basic virtues
B. The power to think clearly, independently, and courageously
C. The talent to understand the views of others and to express one's own views effectively
D. Competence for a suitable occupation
E. Good health
F. Aptitudes for recreation
G. Characteristics for happy family relations
H. Good citizenship
I. The concept that education is a continuing process beyond school

In order to achieve these aims, the commission focused on a number of issues and associated suggestions that are also a repetitive component of subsequent reform discourse: the period of mandatory schooling should be lengthened (with special attention to the importance of early childhood education (ECE) and the sensitive years of transition from child to adolescent that occur between Grades 7 and 9); a minimum achievement standard should be developed and enforced to ensure students graduate with the fundamentals of “political, social and economic efficiency” (p.31); class sizes

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74 This was obviously not popular with Catholics and Francophones, and as Stamp (1982) points out, probably contravened some constitutional rights. Eight of the twenty commissioners registered dissent by writing minority opinions in the final report.
should not be over large\textsuperscript{75}; and teachers should be of higher quality, better educated, and more capable.

In the end, the political and financial costs of implementing the Commission’s recommendations were considered prohibitive. The government (that appointed the commission in the first place) accused it of operating on outdated figures, and the controversial report was widely ignored. In practice, piecemeal changes to program organization and curriculum that were at odds with the report’s proposals had been enacted even while the Commission sat (Stamp, 1982). Radical change was avoided until 1961 when the Conservative Minister of Education, John Robarts, sprung his Reorganized Programme of Studies (aimed at the secondary years) on an astonished educational community that appears to have heard the news via mass media press reviews, rather than through a process of consultation or legislation (Curtis, et al, 1992; Stamp, 1982).\textsuperscript{76} The incentive for rapid change was the availability of federal dollars (via the Technical and Vocational Training Assistance (TVTA) Act) for secondary programs that promoted vocational training. The academic emphasis of the Ontario curriculum at that time stood in the way of satisfying government criteria to obtain much needed funding to build new schools to accommodate a fast-growing high school population. Thus, the curriculum had to be changed and the government presented a terse justification: change was required because, in an increasingly technology-oriented society, it was necessary “to retain in school until at least the end of the Grade 12 year

\textsuperscript{75} The concepts of ‘small’ and ‘large’ in this respect vary over time. In 1950, 30 students was the recommended class size.

\textsuperscript{76} I have had to rely solely on secondary sources to review this policy era. Stamp, draws on a series of internal ME memos, and records from the Ontario Legislature, and Curtis et al rely on Stamp and an unpublished PhD thesis. I was informed by an Ontario Ministry of Education bureaucrat that records and reports are destroyed after 25 years. This policy era would be a worthy archival study all of its own. It parallels the current ME initiatives for change in several ways: amalgamation, centralized control, emphasis on streaming for vocational destinations, and a tendency for front-line educators to hear the latest ME pronouncement via the mass media.
a much higher proportion of the pupils who enrol in Grade 9" (Robarts, 1961, cited in Stamp, 1982 p.204).

The resulting new curriculum promoted strict and early streaming into three tracks. Although these were presented within a “rhetoric of equality” (Curtis et al, 1992), only one led to qualifications for university entrance and all the federal money was spent on developing schools for the vocational streams. Vocational counselling commenced in Grade 9 and by Grade 10, students were locked into one of three tracks.

Robarts subsequently became Ontario premier and, again without public consultation, introduced drastic reorganization of the education governance system. He reduced local education authorities from several thousand to 225, and confronted the issues of religion and language that had divided the Hope Commission, strengthening Francophone rights but not those of the Roman Catholic Sector (Curtis et al, 1992; Stamp, 1982). While the changes in education administration were lasting, the curriculum changes were not. Although it quickly became clear that the vocational program was inferior to the academic track by 1967 almost half of all high school students were in them (Curtis et al, 1992). According to Stamp (1982), these tracks were not the preference of most students, but they were pressured into them anyway. When the federal money dried up, the program began to fall apart and new reforms were called for, including to the academic track.\(^7\)

\(^7\) In fact, a strong opposing view to vocational education had been coexistent. Even as Robarts launched the Reorganized Programme, a formerly powerful ad-hoc committee of University of Toronto academics and Toronto Board of Education personnel (headed by Northrop Frye) published the Design for Learning reports (Frye, 1962). This group was elitist, traditional, and academic, but adamantly opposed to vocational streaming in schools, even for the non-university bound.
A provincial committee was appointed in 1965 to report on the “aims and objectives of education” and the resulting ‘Hall-Dennis’ report was published in 1968. This report heavily emphasized the social morality aspects of the educational discourse. It reflected the freedom and pursuit of truth rhetoric common in the social climate of the late 1960s, and took the stance that education should be free, compulsory, equally accessible, and directed to the full development of humanity (Hall & Dennis, 1968 p.11). Such an education was the “key” to solving the problems of poverty and inequality (p.9). Although it dominated educational practice at the time, the discourse of vocationalism was muted in the report to the statement that the individual must find “himself in a position to make a living adequate to meet his needs” (p.25).

Although the report recommendations were for radical changes, they remained focused on the reorganization of funding, governance, and knowledge presentation and content. Suggestions included: centralizing funding while de-centralizing school and curriculum control; eliminating streaming and adopting an integrated learning model; and replacing the rigid standards associated with quantitative achievement evaluation with personalized learning programs that maximized student choice. ECE was again emphasized, especially for disadvantaged children, and health and social services were to be delivered by the school as a necessary part of a socially responsible education. Despite the launch of pilot models prior to the report’s official release, the Hall-Dennis vision was never fully implemented. Between 1969 and 1972 schools could choose to

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78 The full title of the report was *Living and Learning: The Report of the Provincial committee on Aims and Objectives of Education in the Schools of Ontario.*
79 Beyond this, and despite their mandate, the committee did not arrive at a clear statement of formal educational aims. They essentially adopted the aims from Hope (1950) as the working model (Hall & Dennis, 1968 p.70).
80 Such proposals were clearly highly Utopian and Stamp (1982) suggests muted opposition existed from the outset. The ideas were perhaps reminiscent of those of Rousseau (1979) for the individual pupil, but from the mass educators’ point of view (considering my discussion of Goffman in Chapter One) the practical application must have been mind-boggling to imagine - Radwanski (1987) later referred to them as a “pedagogical Tower of Babel” (p.34). What teacher
adopt the new plan, remain with the old, or combine the two (Stamp, 1982), a situation that must have made the front-line experience of education chaotic and confusing indeed. The initial popular embrace of the report soon turned to strong criticism and teacher militancy, and the next decade was marked by internal policy adjustments aimed at undoing the extremes of both the Hall-Dennis and Robarts plans (Stamp, 1982). ME policy documents (1975, 1984) established curriculum expectations and a secondary credit system that has essentially remained in place until the present round of reforms.

By the mid 1980s the general social, economic and political discourse of the global economy was well established. The discourse of education became strongly linked to the imperatives of the new economy in a series of three very influential Premier's Council reports: *Competing in the New Global Economy* (1988); *People and Skills in the New Global Economy* (1990); and, *Yours, Mine, and Ours* (1994). The Ministry of Education (ME) at this time also commissioned research from a variety of sources, most notably George Radwanski (1987). Radwanski’s report incorporated the imminent crisis discourse of “the new international global economy,” arguing that “we must rely on [education] for our very survival” (p.11). Once again, improving high school completion rates was a concern, and in this regard Radwanski (like Hope, 1950) pointed to the sensitive years between Grades 7-9 as a critical educational transition point. Adopting the language of corporate management, he maintained that “the emphasis of educational philosophy in Ontario be shifted from process to outcomes defined in terms of the acquisition of specified demonstrable knowledge” (p.37). Highly critical of the ME

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(or parent) would welcome the idea of roving bands of around 30 students, pursuing personal interests and not being subjected to any concrete evaluation regarding their progress?

81 These polices abolished the Official Grade 13 university entrance exam and replaced them with Ontario Academic Credits (OACs), which could, in theory, be taken in the fourth year of high school. In practice the fifth year of high school remained but was known as the “OAC year.”
goals and curriculum in place, Radwanski called for a centralized, common, back-to-basics curriculum that focused on a set of indispensable elements. Further, the system needed to be accountable for outcomes that were measured via standardized tests. He was however, adamantly opposed to streaming, which he believed was socially unjust, educationally limiting, and directly related to dropping out (pp.152-153). He wished to abolish even the moderate three-level credit system in favour of “a single and undifferentiated high-quality educational stream for all students” (p.163). He maintained that vocational education was no longer desirable because the skills information age employers wanted were those provided by an academic education, such as literacy, numeracy and good citizenship. He advocated mandatory ECE (and even child care if necessary), along with adequate remedial resources to ensure all students met the required standards.

The ME responded with two policy documents that implemented many of Radwanski’s recommendations: the Transition Years (1992a) and the Common Curriculum Grades 1-9 (1993). These were actually piloted and phased in between 1990 and 1993 and are the first policy changes to directly affect the students who took part in this dissertation research. Incredibly (from pretty much everyone’s point of view), in 1993 the same government that had just implemented these reforms, called a new Royal Commission on Education (Begin & Caplan, 1994). Noting the fates of the “much-neglected Hope commission” and “much-distorted” Hall-Dennis report (p.1.2), this

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82 In fact the Ministry goals, reproduced in Radwanski (1987, pp.30-31) had not strayed far from the Aims presented in Hope (1950) and noted earlier. They had managed to serve as a “basis of operation” for close to 40 years.

83 These were: First Language, Learning to Think and Learning to Learn” (formal logic), Mathematics, Literature, Science and Technology, History, Geography, Citizenship, Work in Society, Second Language, The Arts, Fitness and Health (pp.41-51)

84 The ME balked at the term “standardized test” seemingly confused about its meaning. They decried norm based testing, correctly asserting that it tested students against each other and equating this with “standardized,” but then they introduced criterion standards called “benchmarks,” explaining that these compared students performance to set “standards and examples”, but maintaining no one would be failed (ME, 1992b).
Commission seemed cynical about its mandate “to set new directions in education to ensure that youth are well prepared for the challenges of the 21st century” (Bégin & Caplan, 1994 p.vii). Understandably, teachers complained to the commission about perpetual changes without actual resources to support their implementation, politically inspired directions, and an absence of actual program evaluation (p.3.5).

After very extensive public consultation on the four mandated issues (vision, program, accountability and governance (p.1.11), the commissioners reported a lack of consensus in Ontario “on just about every aspect of the education system” (p. xvi). They nevertheless claimed a unanimous opinion in a report that brought both the polished packaging of the OD contained within the report, and the internal ambivalence and contradictions, to a new level. Saturated in a discourse of risk and crisis, the report introduces a set of catch phrases destined to become pillars of the succeeding era of educational reform: a partnership for shared responsibility in education to achieve new foundations of excellence, quality, rigour, clear and high standards, and accountability. It advances a "doom-and gloom" view of the world that proclaims formal education essential to the post modern climate (pp.1.1, 25) of uncertain “high tech and desperate

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85 Literally thousands of groups and individuals presented views to this commission in a variety of ways, some of which, such as booths in shopping malls, were most innovative. Attempts were made to include marginalized groups such as dropouts and people in jail (pp.1.11-13).

86 The Hall-Dennis report actually represents the vanguard of using a popular media approach to report presentation (A coffee table style book, children’s art work, a separated ‘quick read’ recommendations section. But, as Bégin and Caplan noted, an ‘explosion” of the everyday use of internet technology literally occurred during the time the 1994 Royal Commission sat, and the form(s) of the report reflect this. It was comprised of a boxed set of five colourful volumes (four report sections and a short overview) plus a compact disk version. The printed report features photographs, diagrams, corner-page summaries, “voices” (little vignettes and anecdotal quotes), observations, summaries, and opinions that encourage skim reading that assumes an overview of the gist of the report is contained in these highlights. I found the full text, however, to be extremely dense and marked by lengthy discussions of differing opinions. The actual recommendations seldom reflected the opinions of the students, parents or teachers, whose comments were featured in the eye-catching highlights.

87 Although Bégin & Caplan do not belabour these catch phrases in the way subsequent ME communications do, the catchwords can be found in the “purposes of school” section of the Short Version (pp.4-5), along with a confirmation (albeit a strangely contradictory one) of moral and economic agendas of schooling.
economic times” (p.xiv), marked by rising unemployment (p.1.26), fragile families (p.xiv), increased and changing patterns of diversity (pp.1.28-29), and aging teachers (p.1.32). Such social conditions necessitated “a high quality, effective, lifelong learning system” (p.1.8), which would require four key partners in education - “students, the teachers, students’ families, and the community” (p.1.5) - to “sharpen the focus” of education in Ontario (p.1.54).

In order to achieve the change the education system required, the Commission offered a set of familiar-sounding educational purposes: intellectual development, learning to learn, citizenship, preparation for work, and instilling values (p.1.54). Four “engines” were to drive reform: “early childhood education, teacher development, information technology, and community education” (p. 1.6). The first two engines are immediately recognizable elements from the earlier discourse of educational reforms, and although the latter two employ new terms, they represent the old ideas of economic and social competency. In keeping with its mandate to prepare students for the 21st century, the commission viewed computer literacy as an essential basic on a par with math and language skills (p.1.6). The engine of “community education” is juxtaposed to the notion of globality, advocating a meso-level focus on shared responsibility, as in the African proverb “it takes a whole village to raise a child” (p.4.32). This discourse of partnership advocates the formation of SCs (consisting of parents, students, teachers, service providers, community members) to promote holistic education models of high quality, tailored to local needs and reflecting meaningful, significant parent and community involvement (p.4.38). But, in one of the report's many notable contradictions, it also recommends the centralization of curriculum design (p.2.6), and of funding (p.4.179) - the two areas that gave localities any power in the educational program in the first place.
The core subjects, standardized testing (p.1.47), and the need for sensitivity to the adolescent transition years (pp.2.40-51) (proposed by Radwanski (1987) and already in process of implementation), were endorsed by the Commission. The report criticized the Common Curriculum guidelines for being “too numerous and too vague” (p.2.58) but called only for revisions with concrete examples (p.56). Inconsistently, it was ambivalent about streaming, stating that by “the end of Grade 9, students would be ready and eager to commit themselves to some specialization, with a view to a post-secondary career” (p.2.66). Although the term is avoided, the vocationalism is further underlined:

We want to build a secondary program that rests on high standards, rigour, and continuity of general education and the opportunity for specialization. We want all students to be able to choose a program based on their interests and aptitudes, in which links are made between academics and applications, and between school and working-and-learning settings outside of school (pp.2.87-8).

The report acknowledged cultural and equity issues, but the discussions are ambivalent at best. A notable example is the odd distinction made between students who are disadvantaged by gender and culture, and those who are victims of “deficit,” which apparently means parental abuse and neglect (pp.1.57-60). The purpose appears to be to shift responsibility for academic failure due to deficit away from the educational system.88

88 Personally, I find the possible implications of some segments of the report dealing with “disadvantage” socially abhorrent. The Commission (in a departure from all previous reform reports) opposed mandated integrated classrooms and recommended the provision of segregated services for some students, specifically gifted programming and acceleration (shunned by Hope, Hall-Dennis, and Radwanski) (p.2.115). In contrast, there are statements concerning troubled students that seem aimed at shifting any responsibility for support or intervention away from the education system. In a particularly distasteful example, the report claims that while its recommendations would reduce the dropout rates due to curriculum problems, some students would inevitably drop out discouraged for reasons beyond the control of the school. The point is illustrated with a highlighted quote “My father was having sex with me. I could survive or I could go to school, but I couldn’t do both” (p.2.93). Earlier the report has suggested that social services are not a function of the school program arguing that “community resources can be brought to the school and students can also be encouraged to move out into the community” (p.1.58). The ambiguity concerning the exact meaning here is never clarified. If social services are not to be in the school then are students in need to be simply pushed out of the school? Perhaps the intent is to refer students to community services, but who is to ensure
In 1995, the New Democratic Party (NDP) released *New Foundations for Ontario Education: A Summary*, which mirrored the Royal Commission’s rhetoric of excellence, rigour, high standards and accountability. It also introduced a series of policy initiatives related to eight areas of recommendations made by the Royal Commission: province-wide curriculum and reporting; assessment and accountability; early learning and literacy; teacher education; the secondary school program; information technology; SCs; and school boards and trustees (p.1). Proposed was a centralized curriculum with standard testing and reporting to assure accountability; the establishment of the Ontario College of Teachers to develop standards of practice, training and certification of teachers; an end to OACs; expanded career planning and work experience; a “comprehensive” ECE program (pp.14-15); an Ontario Parent Council (already established) “to provide advice to the Minister on educational issues” (p.4), with SCs to be in place by June 1996; and, amalgamated boards (reduced by up to half) with fewer trustees and capped compensation rates. Almost immediately, a provincial election replaced the NDP with the Progressive Conservatives led by Premier Mike Harris, but most of these proposals went ahead under the new government, although the public was clearly not intended to see what happened next as a continuum of change already begun.

The incoming government had a clear fiscal agenda to reduce the deficit by cutting “unnecessary” spending and as Wotherspoon (1998) points out, large education budgets are an obvious target in such a climate. The conservatives leaned heavily on the rhetoric of economic and social crisis, launching an immediate and overt attack on this is done? In any event, it would seem students are being dually positioned as educable - or not - and if they are not, the education system is not responsible.

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89 The NDP Minister of Education, David Cooke is a recurring character in the ensuing reform saga. Despite the diametric change of political party, Cooke later became head of the Education Improvement Committee (EIC), which in April 2000, told the government it needed to back off some of its reform plans and the attacks on teachers (See NR4; OCASC9, in Appendix B).
Ontario’s education system.\footnote{A simultaneous and equally blatant attack was directed at social welfare. Health care cuts have also been ongoing, but probably more covert in terms of derogatory rhetoric about the providers and recipients of health services.} Within days of taking office, John Snobelen, the newly appointed Minister of Education was video-taped making a speech to senior ME bureaucrats in which he maintained it was necessary to invent a crisis in the system of education in order to cause change (OC1, OC1a\footnote{As mentioned earlier, sources informing my discussion from this point on were often in the form of memos, news releases and other postings to the internet by the ME and associated organizations and groups. As many occurred in the same year, a referencing system is used that assigns identifying letters to the sources (accompanied by the page number when required). A full key to the sources is provided in Appendix A.}). The furore following mass media exposure of the event prompted a letter of apology to every school board, university president and parents group in Ontario, but further improbable claims followed. Snobelen suggested he would put a computer on the desk of every Ontario child (OC1), while simultaneously announcing the intent to cut $1 billion from the education budget (which had already experienced four years of cuts under the NDP (OC2). After Snobelen had wheeled a barrow of reports into the Ontario Legislature, the ME claimed in a newsletter that “despite 24 separate reviews since 1950...Ontario is one of the last jurisdictions in Canada to launch a reform of its education system” (OS1 p.1), a statement the Media were happy to perpetuate despite its inaccuracy. Most of the “changes” purportedly introduced by Snobelen, had been suggested by Bégin and Caplan (1994) with corresponding policy initiatives begun by the previous government.\footnote{The conservatives did depart from the NDP agenda in two fundamental ways: Snobelen advocated streaming from the outset, and he undid the mandated delivery of junior kindergarten introduced by the NDP. The latter was controversial and although Snobelen originally defended the action as an election promise, he later denied that funding for JKs had been cut. However, by making JK non-mandatory and slashing overall funding, he essentially made the program dispensable. He was under continual attack for this until removed from the position (OBE1; JC4,5,6).}

School Councils were mandated as originally scheduled (PPM #122), and in April 1997, Bill 104 established the Education Improvement Commission (EIC) to oversee school board amalgamations, fewer and cheaper trustees, and centralized, equalized funding,
all to be in place by November 1997 - the original NDP timeline. Purportedly ‘new’ curriculum guidelines for Grades 1-8 were introduced, but my examination of these suggests that they clarified the Common Curriculum outcomes, but were not substantively different to them (OCL; OCM).\textsuperscript{93} Secondary school reform was pushed forward, then later delayed a year (NR5), with the ME proclaiming the four year program reflected “public desire” to prepare for the “competitive global economy by providing “options for every student to succeed…in the future.” This was to be achieved by placing a greater emphasis on math, language, science and “responsible citizenship” (NR8; BG20). Underneath the surface rhetoric was a more controversial proposal to re-introduce a rigid system of streaming, initially disguised as ‘options’ between university and non-university tracks but later called “flexible streaming” (OC3: OSS pp.9-13; CG pp. 3-4 NR8; BG20).\textsuperscript{94}

From 1997 through 2001 the ME used various forms of mass media to promote the key elements of the discourse intended to drive and legitimate its proposed reforms. News releases were frequent and well covered by the media. They were also posted to the ME web site, along with options for the full text or highlighted reports, discussion papers, and an e-mail service to inform the internet savvy of new postings. For those who avoided the usual forms of information dissemination, the ME delivered regular ‘updates’ to each household in Ontario (PP1,2, 4-8,10\textsuperscript{95}; NR7; OC22a,b, 33; OH1). Much

\textsuperscript{93} These clarifications of outcomes (or required standards, along with standardized testing have, however, altered the delivery of the curriculum content. Further, the elimination of the OAC required that the delivery of curriculum be speeded up. This appears to have made the pace and content of grades 7-9 substantially more difficult for students (OC15, 31, 51; OH1)

\textsuperscript{94} The ME claimed students in Grade nine could take either “academic” or “applied” courses to try them out, and then choose between the tracks in Grade 10 where “changes” would still be possible. By Grade 11 students would be streamed according to their “chosen destination, whether university, college or work” (BG 20 p.1). Teachers had already complained of insufficient resources and preparation for the curriculum changes and this stance was subsequently taken up by the Liberal party opposition (OH1 p.32)

\textsuperscript{95} Many of these pamphlets were specifically about the educational reforms (there was even a height measurement wall chart with all the key phrases (PP6), but some concerned the
of this top level of rhetoric was generally acceptable to stakeholders and was reflected in the statements and handbooks of local school boards and their area schools. After all, who could really disagree with the incoming address of the new OCDSB education director when he spoke of heading a “high achieving organization, quality education, accountability, fiscal efficiency, community involvement, and recognition of staff and volunteer effort”?\(^96\) (OCDSB3)\(^97\)

Problems arose, however, around the discourse concerning the reforms and methods proposed to bring about such an ‘excellent’ system. The first to contest the proposals publicly were the teachers whose competence had been under government attack from the outset. This positioning of the teachers, and the involvement of parents and students in the contested discourses, I discuss in more detail presently; suffice it to say for now that tensions escalated into open media and legal warfare between the government and teachers federations. (OC9-11, 21-31, 41, 44, 50; NR12).

The other reform area that has caused the government much grief is that of ‘fiscal efficiency.’ Immediately after election, the Progressive Conservatives began the amalgamation of school boards and centralization of all education funding, both of which were recommendations made by the 1994 Royal Commission. The government, however, accompanied the reform with a much-publicized declaration of massive funding cuts, which, as I suggested earlier, is an approach that invites equally noisy oppositional responses. Furthermore, the process of amalgamation created large and powerful metropolitan boards with rich local tax bases they were reluctant to relinquish. Immediately upon its introduction in 1997, these ‘mega’ boards engaged in battle over

\(^96\) But note the absence of any mention of recognition the student!
\(^97\) Another example of how this top-level of educational discourse is embraced by groups concerned with egalitarian reform is provided by the Caledon Institute for Social Policy in the series *Communities and Schools* (Torjman, 2000).
the government's “funding formula.” For example, the Ottawa Board of Education (OBE), while still in the process of amalgamating with the Carleton Board of Education (CBE) to become the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB), challenged Snobelen “to come and get” the funding reserve they had created from the previous tax system (OC15). A media-published war of words continued thereafter, culminating in the summer of 2002 with the ME seizing control of OCDSB operations.\footnote{The OCDSB was one of several militant Ontario boards. In order to be able to seize operational control of rebel boards, the majority government rammed through the controversial Bill 160. Ottawa-Carleton, Hamilton-Wentworth, and the Toronto District school boards were ‘investigated’ by the ME for refusing to submit balanced budgets. All investigations concluded the trustees were irresponsible and ‘supervisors were appointed to take over the boards in August 2002 (NR16,17,18). This battle continued until The Liberals were elected in 2003.}

The government justification for cutting $1 billion in education funding was a claim of administrative waste. Amalgamating boards and closing under-utilized schools were supposed to be cost-cutting measures, but the expense of achieving them was not addressed. In addition, the ME claimed it was diverting administrative savings to “in classroom” spending, thus “putting students first” and providing “student focused funding [that] increases classroom spending” (PP5). In practice, this meant cuts to student support services: less money for special education, counselling of all kinds, and other supports such as library services. An OCDSB news release responded with oppositional rhetoric:

[The funding formula] will pit program against program, school against school, and employee group against employee group. We fear parents and students will see dramatic changes...[with] negative implications. [OCDSB1]

To summarize, in the previous discussion I have illustrated the existence of an OD built upon elements that are recognizably present across periods of reform. The top layer of this discourse consists of an ‘apple pie’ type of rhetoric that sounds good to almost everyone. It suggests cohesion of opinion exists about public education and the direction it should take. With the government claiming that proposed changes will
achieve the promised high quality education needed to avert imminent national and individual, economic and social, disaster, this layer of discourse provides a motive for the reform agenda that is acceptable to the public. But, the OD precariously combines social fear (the risk of impending chaos) with a promise of social cohesion and prosperity (well educated, responsible and efficient future citizens). The seeds of contradiction are inevitably contained within this juxtaposition and the government must constantly legitimate its actual reform agenda. But what if the introduced changes do not bring the promised results, but rather seem to deepen the climate of chaos they promised to divert? To answer this I turn to a discussion of how the front-line stakeholders are positioned and re-positioned within the underlying details of the OD. In particular I draw attention to the ways in which those with the least power in the educational stakes are ultimately positioned to shoulder the responsibility if the systemic reforms should fail to produce the promised outcomes.

Re-forming the Front-line: Positioning the Teacher-Student-Parent Triad

As already mentioned, the notion of “partnership” in education has become an element of the discourse of education and reform, and I have argued at the beginning of this chapter that this same discourse serves to stratify these so called partners in particular ways in relation to the educational process and to each other. I have further suggested that this positioning serves to transfer the responsibility for educational failure from the government (as system director) onto others, particularly the teacher-student-parent triad that forms the front line of designated partners. This process is dynamic and positioning and re-positioning may occur in any or all of the following ways:99

99 There may be additional ways in which the positioning occurs, but this list represents those that I was able to identify and illustrate via my research and analysis.
• Via underlying assumptions that drive educational philosophies and practice (such as those discussed in Chapter One, and below)

• Through policies that (deliberately or accidentally) operate to sort and position groups in relation to educational and labour force opportunities, and other status markers (e.g., specifically via streaming, or arbitrarily because of failure to consider policy implications fully).

• By being caught in the cross-fire of disagreement among groups of stakeholders (e.g., students in particular are used as gambits in political sniping)

• By deliberate choice on how to position themselves in response to the positioning that policies attempt to impose upon them.

The set of assumptions about dominant knowledge, partial agency and homogeneity of groups (identified and discussed in Chapter One) is used within the dominant discourse on education to construct the stratified relations of participation and responsibility among and between teachers, students and parents. The assignation of different, often contradictory, roles and expectations, frequently put together with the archetypal dualism of good-bad, serves to promote interactions marked by differing, and often hostile, perspectives. As a consequence, this layer of the OD becomes complex and subject to internal tensions and contradictions leading minimally to debate about what is the ‘best’ way to provide education, and at times virulent opposition to educational policies and/or reform proposals.

The supposition that dominant knowledge (presented in the form of the official curriculum) is desirable and preferable to any other form of knowledge is at the core of philosophies of public education and part of the generally agreed upon top layer of the OD. That this surface discourse also positions students as a homogeneous group in relation to desirable education outcomes and labour force opportunities is well illustrated
in the preceding discussion of reform policies and reports. It is also well documented, to the point of general knowledge, that students do not arrive in school as one uniformly prepared homogeneous group – the dominant knowledge perspective of the overt and hidden curricula pose considerable difficulties for students from subordinate social groups (Bernstein, 1977; Bordieu & Passeron, 1977; Curtis et al., 1992; Solomon, 1992).

Educational discourse is thus forced to contain this inherent contradiction. Policy discussions generally give lip service to providing compensation to students who lack the ‘right’ skills to manage school, and yet the actual enactment of the policies, in the name of ‘fiscal efficiency,’ serves to reduce or eliminate such supports.

The government, as the systemic body responsible for the delivery of the excellent education its (now precarious) discourse promises, needs to shift the responsibility for failure away from itself. The discourse of a mutually desirable system of mass education relies (of necessity) on an assumption of homogeneous social understanding regarding the value of the enterprise, yet must negotiate the patently obvious lack of it among those to be educated. I argue that the sub-texts of educational policy discussions acknowledge the existence of social sub-groups, but exploit the differences among these groups, while still retaining a notion of homogeneity within them that allows a play on the relative moral and social status of individual students, and their parents and teachers. In addition, the notion of incompetent social agency is extended to some teachers and parents – those who are not ‘good’ enough educational partners.

Discussion of the necessary contributions of teachers and parents to student success is present from Hope (1950)\(^\text{100}\) and as the rhetoric of partnership increased in

\(^{100}\) Hall and Dennis (1968) are the first to speak specifically of education as a partnership among home, school and community (p.14). They liken the education system to a totem pole with the Ministry at the top and the teacher at the foot. The student is placed just above the teacher. Within the report text, school boards controlled district organization and curriculum design. Teachers were responsible for imparting the curriculum to students. Parents were assigned a
subsequent reports, so did the explicit descriptions of the (so-called) partners’ hierarchical roles, especially with the heavy emphasis on partnership that accompanied the introduction of SCs. Ironically, overall policy changes increased the controlling power of the ME leaving the various other stakeholders with less. Under current legislation, the Ministry is responsible for provincial policy, curriculum, developing a framework for partnerships, accountability and reporting procedures, and, of course, funding. Boards are responsible for “implementing and complying with provincial policy” (OSS p.37) and “reviewing the allocation of resources to determine appropriate support for the implementation of secondary school policies and programs” (OSS p.38) – that is, they must balance the budget with the funds assigned to them. Schools (meaning principals and teachers) are responsible for delivering courses, ensuring professional development, keeping records, working with the SCs and collaborating with all other local "partners" (OSS p.38). School councils must include the principal, a teacher, a non-teaching staff member, a community representative, and (mandatory at the secondary level only101) a student, but the chair and a majority of members must be parents (PPM 122 p.1). As Tilleczek (1997) has also pointed out, PPM 122 further suggests that SC members will make specific, but unequal contributions:

The government recognizes that the education of Ontario's young people is a shared responsibility involving schools, students and their families, and members of the community. Parents and guardians have the right, as well as the responsibility, to participate in the education of their children, and can contribute to their children's development in a wide variety of ways. Other members of the community, including members of health, social service, and recreational agencies, also offer a wealth of experience and expertise that may be of benefit to students. Students themselves may have some excellent suggestions pertaining to their education. Members of all these groups should, therefore, have the opportunity to advise in educational matters (PPM 122 P.1)

right to liaise between the school and the community and make choices about their child's education. Students are not given a specific role in the process. (pp.11, 198-199)

101 It should be noted that generally, where any attention is given to student participation/agency it begins at adolescence. Other children are simply not considered.
Parents have a right and responsibility, community members have expertise (note that teachers are excluded from specific mention, even as an expert source), and students may have some suggestions to offer. PPM 122 suggested that the responsibilities of SCs should include establishing school profiles, codes of conduct, extra curricular activities, local co-ordination of services for children and youth, liaison with other local schools, and participation in the “review of board polices at the local level” (p.3). By the specific inclusion of the words “local level" and "board" and the exclusion of any mention of the ME, it is made clear that SCs are not expected to advise the ministry, and just in case a council should become too troublesome, the School Council Handbook (1996) contains a warning: “[m]embers of council may be personally liable if they go beyond the advisory role or do not follow the ministry or board policies” (SCH p.55). Despite later claims by the ME that parent participation in directing educational processes had been strengthened, the only actual change was that previously suggested activities became mandated (EIC1; OCASC6; NR15.). At the same time, legislation was passed to strengthen the powers of the ME to control troublesome individuals among SC and school board members (OCASC2, 3, 4, 7).

A discourse of partnership is utilized because the ME needs to create an appearance of public input and participation. As a government system it also needs to retain hierarchical control and a truly equitable social partnership is not compatible with this. Therefore, available avenues of participation are limited and well controlled and the ME is specific and clear about the acceptable boundaries of the partners’ agency in the

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102 Tilleczek’s (1997) analysis of policy demonstrates that with each successive round of input leading to the actual policy document (PMM 122) the portrayal of students as having the right and the ability to participate meaningfully is diminished.

103 The Education Act was amended to enforce sections of Bill 160 and Bill 74 that were not rescinded or struck down as unconstitutional. This included the right of the ME to take over the control of school boards from non-compliant trustees.
educational process. Even limited opportunities for interaction among frontline stakeholders can, nevertheless, provide opportunities to develop counter discourse and action, and thus it is in the interests of the controlling group to also promote divisive perspectives among (and within) the partner groups. I turn now to illustrations of the ways in which the OD positions each of the three front-line groups, dealing first with the teacher as direct agent of the education system, second with the parent(s) as the adult(s) society holds most immediately responsible for the direction of an individual child, and finally to the student as the focal point of this interaction triad.

**The Positioning of Teachers: Saint or Scapegoat?**

As agents of the education system, teachers might be expected to be the most powerful and influential of the front-line partners. Evidence suggests, however, that they seldom have any real power within the system, and although, in theory, they wield a warden-like power over their students, in reality that power is tenuous, depending on the engagement of the student in the educational stakes, and/or the relative power of the students' family within the school community. The employment of the good-bad dualism is astonishingly explicit in textual references to teachers. They are portrayed as “keystone” professionals (Hope, 1950 p.564) in the education system, the “central agent” and “most vital component” (Bégin & Caplan, 1994) - "the key to excellence" (ME, 1995 p.17). “The good teacher is as important as the curriculum” (Dennis & Hall, 1968 p.17), and reaches and encourages students through being dedicated, versatile and actively...

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104 This kind of action by bureaucratic systems is well theorized. The incorporation and co-optation (adjustment) of new discursive elements of ‘partnership’ into the existing set of ME practices is an excellent example of Foucault’s arguments discussed in Chapter One.

105 This is a complicated matter just as is the case with warders and prisoners. I believe the power relations of teachers-student-parents is worthy of much more focused theoretical and applied research. During my interactions with teachers, some complained that they had no power to discipline unruly and non-compliant students, especially when neither student nor parent valued educational achievement. Other teachers (invariably those willing to invite me into their classrooms) had no problem exercising control over the classroom, regardless of who was in it. Students complained about, and did not respect, teachers who could not control their classrooms.
involved (ME, 1993a p.3). “[G]ood teachers foster a love of learning and provide a supportive atmosphere for all students” (Bégin & Caplan p.1.77) by caring about them, making knowledge accessible to them, being guided by clear goals, exercising self-critique, and collaborating with, peers, students, parents and the community (pp.1.78-82). “Good teachers know that they must persevere and make every reasonable attempt to ensure sound learning for every student” (OCL p.4). Although, according to Bégin and Caplan, teachers “are not gods,” they are “heroes”(1994 p.1.61), who “must always model good communication skills and positive interpersonal behaviour” (p.2.34), reflecting the basic values of “non-violence, anti-racism, honesty and justice, individual responsibility, and service to the community” (p.1.54). Indeed, the good teacher is both saint and superhero!

The contradictory counter positioning of the teacher is equally marked. Within the same texts that lavish such praise on the “good” teacher, co-exists a relentless rhetoric of teacher incompetence. Teachers are found, from 1950 to the present, to be insufficiently trained (Hope 1950 pp.577-616; Hall & Dennis, 1968 pp.182-187; Bégin & Caplan, 1994, vol.3; OSS, 1996 p.36; OC17; PP10). Repeatedly, reports and policies maintain, explicitly and implicitly that teachers are doing an inadequate job and require better initial training, further professional development, and assistance from outside specialists and experts. Radwanski (1987) does suggest that the teachers are victims of a system that is in need of change and has failed them by providing insufficient training and support; but he still holds teachers responsible for properly delivering the curriculum - after all, “no teacher worthy of being employed” could fail to take into account individual

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Gaining control derived from treating the students with respect as opposed to the use of punitive measures.

106 The 1950 version of this was that the qualities of a teacher ’should include a high standard of physical and mental health, superior intelligence, deep and abiding religious faith, a mature and stable personality, and a willingness and ability to mingle and co-operate with his fellows” (Hope p.564).
development and then deliver the curriculum content in such a way as to meet all students' needs (p.186).

Teachers are further negatively positioned as in need of more control, regulation and monitoring by a system that could revoke their license if they are found lacking (Hall & Dennis, 1968 pp.137-149; Bégin & Caplan, 1994: pp.4.171/2; OSS p.36). As well as being outdated (Bégin & Caplan, 1994 p.4.9) and afraid of assessment and accountability (Bégin & Caplan, 1994 p.1.49), teachers are apparently also guilty of social prejudice and dishonesty to a degree that necessitates centralizing curriculum development in order to ensure that it is "representative, inclusive, and academically, honest and ambitious" (Bégin & Caplan, 1994 p.2.6). Furthermore, despite the heroic stature of 'good' teachers, they are accused of class bias, frequent reluctance to co-operate with parents (Radwanski, 1987 p.182), and subjected to insinuations that they are overpaid and could be replaced by less costly, but potentially more capable, personnel (Radwanski, 1987 p.186; OBE4; JC6). Given this impossible positioning as hero-saint or scapegoat for the education system, it is not surprising that Bégin and Caplan also found teachers to be "feeling overwhelmed by conflicting expectations" (p.1.47), especially as in the new rhetoric of partnership they are not even recognized as active partner-agents. Alone among the stakeholders to whom PMM 122 ascribes specific role and contributions, teachers are simply omitted.¹⁰⁷

The Positioning of Parents: Asset or Liability?

Despite the heroic efforts of the good teacher, it is the parents who are constructed as primarily responsible for the academic performance of their children. According to Hope (1950) differences in the mental abilities of students were more due

¹⁰⁷ See earlier quote from PMM 122. Teachers are mentioned in the appendix of the School Council Handbook (1996) in the same way that students are (discussed below). Their classroom responsibilities, as set out in the Education Act (which reflects the "good teacher" rhetoric). In this
to incorrect parental attitudes than “native endowment” (p.27). The parent whose shortcomings (such as neglecting or refusing to ensure school attendance) hampered a child's learning should be punished (p.46) because the "good" parent values education.

In Hall and Dennis (1968), the concept that parents have rights in directing their children's education emerges (p.11) accompanied by a sub-text that suggests only some parents deserve such rights. Parents with low social economic status (SES) are assumed to be incompetent and to consist of mainly of “young mothers...working outside the home...obliged to leave their youngsters in the care of untrained people” (p.114), who cannot provide the “head-start” needed to do well in school. Based on characteristics of class and gender, a dualism emerges in which parents at an economic disadvantage are poor parents, incapable of looking after their own or other children, and thus, we must assume, not the parents who will assist in “interpreting the school to the community and...keeping the school staff aware of the needs of the community” (p.199). Rather, the school must compensate for the failures of the poor (read "bad") parent because, as Radwanski (1987) suggests, low SES parents are not competent to advise their children on course selections (p.170), and easily become “intimidated, uncomfortable, or even unsupportive” by/of teachers (p.182). They must, therefore, be “educated” by mass media campaigns and persuaded to place their children in ECE programs (p.126).

It might be expected that growing awareness of equity issues would serve to soften such rhetoric. Instead, and despite the enhanced discourse of partnership, Bégin and Caplan (1994) expand the discourse of parental incompetence and apply it to all families declaring that “meeting the challenges of the 1990s is beyond the capacity of respect, the presence of teachers on SCs smacks of tokenism (as does that of the student). The role of the principal is presented differently as that of an administrator and facilitator.
an increasing number of parents” (p.4.33). In contrast to the family of 30 years ago, where “we could count on children walking home at lunch...for a hot meal or on a parent helping...with homework (p.4.33), today's families are fragile, under siege, over-extended at work, and beset or bewildered by social problems such as AIDS and drugs, that make imparting values to their children problematic (pp.1.xiv, 1.27-28, 4.33-34). Parents are, nevertheless, responsible for children’s school-readiness (or lack of it), so they must be trained to understand the “desirable and expectable learner outcomes” from birth on (pp.2.13-22). How else, given their besieged state, could they possibly become the dually proclaimed, “well-informed, well-respected, and equally powerful partners” who “dialogue with teachers on the subject of their child’s progress” (p.2.1)?

These contradictory rhetorics of rights, responsibilities, and partnership versus incompetence and confusion, carry into current policy documents, along with the accompanying implication that the powerful and competent parent advises and directs the teacher, while the incompetent one is advised and directed instead (NR3; OCM/L p.4; PPM 122; SCH p.23). Indeed, during the present period of reform, the ME has repeatedly claimed to have heard, listened and responded to the concerns of parents (OH1; PP2; NR14,15). Thus, oppositional relationships are set up: "good" parents are powerful and have knowledge and advice to offer teachers (especially those who fall short of sainthood), but "bad" parents need to be advised, directed and compensated for by the "good" teacher who, guided by the ME, is always sensitive enough to behave appropriately.

**The Positioning of Students: Responsible Agents or Social Wards?**

At the most general level of discourse – where it is maintained that change is necessary to achieve high quality education - students are presented as a homogenous

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108 The mythical nature of a non-mobile, stable, two-parent, housewife, family, with middle class living standards has been well-documented as a fleeting and minority occurrence (Bradbury,
group of partial and incompetent social agents, both at risk from, and posing a risk to, society at large. Thus they are in need of both guidance and control, and as the discussion of teachers and parents makes apparent, students are, \textit{de facto}, positioned as wards of parents and teachers in cooperation with the state. As discussed in Chapter One, contemporary understanding of cognitive development, however, demands a recognition that students are at least active participants in the learning process, but they are nevertheless, persistently portrayed as only partial agents and are seldom consulted about the educational process.\textsuperscript{109} An assumption prevails that all students in school (even though some may be over 18 years old) are incompetent to participate fully or make rational decisions. Radwanski (1987) makes this view crystal clear when he states that the education system must ensure that every child will emerge “knowing that which society has decided he or she should know and possessing those skills that society has decided he or she should possess” (p.52). He takes a "benevolent dictator" position elaborating that:

We do not permit 15-year-olds in our society to vote, to drive a car, or to consume alcohol...we do all this in the conviction that adolescents in general cannot be expected to have the maturity and the experience to make sound judgements in crucial areas.

And yet, paradoxically we have somehow convinced ourselves that we are doing those same young people a favour by leaving it largely up to them to decide for themselves - inevitably on the basis of inadequate prior knowledge and experience - what they need or don’t need to learn during those crucial high school years. (pp.166-167).

Even when more lip service to student agency is present, policy essentially assumes the student is there to be acted upon and moulded into a desirable citizen. Where student participation is advocated, a simultaneous discussion also occurs about why the students’ activities must be guided and controlled. Noting that adolescents wish to assert agency and that to treat them as children in the classroom is to insult them,

Hall and Dennis (1968) argue that "we must listen to the young people and give them a chance to speak out" (p.45). Yet, just a few pages later they state:

The committee does not necessarily subscribe to these youthful presentations [made to it]. It merely offers them as proof that children as well as adults have opinions about their educational experiences. They deserve, at least, a sympathetic ear (p.99).

The student-agent appears before the committee, is heard, but not necessarily listened to with serious intent. ¹¹⁰

Bégin and Caplan (1994) also assert the need to allow students "to express themselves". Adolescents, they argue, “increasingly demand to be treated like adults; to make choices, participate in important decisions, and take control of their own lives, including their lives at school" (p.2.49) and they should be listened to because “[w]e want schools to develop students - all students - who are feisty, questioning, creative, imaginative, autonomous, and independent” (p.1.59). While this seems to be the antithesis of Radwanski’s position, Bégin & Caplan's initial plea for participation and agency by students is repeatedly qualified. For example, they simultaneously note that adolescence is “a period of rapid and uneven physical growth and unsettling emotional development....experiment with the limits of acceptable behaviour and physical risk. Peer pressure is strong. Vulnerability is high" (p.2.49). The implication is clear: teenagers are erratic and unpredictable; they may want and need “meaningful participation” but it must only be granted in ways adults can determine and oversee.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ This is something that Bégin & Caplan (1994 p.xvii) acknowledge, and a student was included on the Commission. Ultimately, however, the discourse about ‘youth’ is unchanged.
¹¹⁰ Students make a distinction between being heard (after all they are constructed as ’noisy’) and being actually listened to. See in particular the quote in my dissertation Conclusions: “And that's the difference - they hear us, but they are not listening” [49M12].
¹¹¹ Bégin and Caplan’s suggestions of suitable participation involve assignation to smaller learning units, teacher-mentors, a “Cumulative Education Plan” (pp.2.49-51), and perhaps, some senior students working with teachers and administrators, “might create a checklist of the ways students could be involved in decision making at both the classroom and the school level” (p.2.53).
Limited as student "rights" as partner and social agent might be in practice, in current policy the rights rhetoric is joined with one of responsibilities. The School Council Handbook (1997 p.60) makes it particularly clear what the student responsibilities of participation are. As set out in the Education Act, students are responsible for attending class regularly, exercising self-discipline, accepting discipline; observing rules and standards of conduct such as cleanliness, diligence, courteousness and obedience, and finally, to take any tests or examinations required. This statement occurs, it should be noted, in a guide to the participation of the partners on SCs, and is the only specific statement made about student participation. The guides to the new Ontario curriculum have a little more to say on student responsibility, however:

Good students have learned that attention and a willingness to work hard will enable them to develop the skills, knowledge, creativity, and personal qualities that good programs can foster. Some young people face extra challenges and may be growing up in an environment that provides little or no support. For these students, taking responsibility for learning may be more difficult, and the patience and encouragement of sensitive teachers may be an extremely important factor for success. Nonetheless, learning to take responsibility for one's progress and learning is an important part of education for every student (OCM/L p.4).

This statement is a particularly noteworthy example of the positioning of students for several reasons. First, it contains explicit and implicit references to "good" and "bad" students, teachers and parents. Students without good parents are disadvantaged and will need good teachers, but even if they do not get any, ultimately it is their responsibility not to become bad students. Second, the fact that this document is aimed at Grades1-8 make this sudden endowing of students with such responsibility for their own educational outcomes even more remarkable - if adolescents cannot make sensible choices how can young children "decide" to be responsible for their learning progress in the face of social disadvantage? Finally, the statement provides an example of the interrelationship of the positioning of the student-parent-teacher triad in ways that serve to absolve the ME from any responsibility for poor educational outcomes.
Students then, like their parents and teachers, are dually positioned based on assumptions about their competence to participate in the educational process. They are portrayed as both *irresponsible* and yet somehow ultimately *responsible* for being good and successful students. Policy initiatives have further implications for the positioning of students, however, often by specifically stratifying them within the educational process itself. For most of the time between 1950 and the present, a fairly explicit system of streaming (or minimally, ability grouping) has operated in high schools. That such sorting of students operates more by social characteristics than academic ability has been well documented (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Curtis et al., 1992; Solomon, 1992). Along with a return to a strict and early streaming policy the most recent reform initiatives offer an interesting new twist on the mass-stratification of groups of youth in the schooling-skills-work stakes.

As discussed earlier, the *Transition Years* program (along with the *Common Curriculum*) was introduced in the early 1990s as the way of the future, intended to provide youth with the flexibility of thinking needed in the information age. The policy rhetoric claimed to promote students' active critical involvement in an education aimed at developing the values, knowledge, and skills needed in a "changing world" (ME, 1993a pp.3-7). Now, under the new round of reforms, the "beneficiaries" of that policy (who include all of the students who took part in this dissertation study) have been re-positioned. Instead of being the vanguard of the future, they are now held up as having received an inadequate education, and as completing high school without having obtained sufficient basic skills (EE, JC5; NR1, OSS). The implication of the new policy discourse seems clear enough, even explicit at times. For example, consider Snobelen's statement in the Ontario Legislature to the leader of the opposition: "you could have [introduced tough curriculum standards] seven years ago. But instead you chose to condemn these students to a substandard level of education" (JC5). It is impossible to
determine the degree to which this positioning is an arbitrary result of a failure to see the implications for this group of Ontario school-leavers, or a deliberately conscious ploy. The ME has specifically reinforced the appearance of writing off the Transition Years students by providing a new curriculum and equipment for the elementary grades (including those who will form the younger half of the double cohort) (BG5, 20; NR8) but made no attempt to adjust or compensate the condemned high school curriculum still to be used with five cohorts of students. It is difficult to understand, however, why the ME would deliberately wish to construct half a generation of youth as inadequate, undesirable future employees. Regardless of intent, the Transition Years students have become pawns in a political game that may have an extremely negative impact on their future economic prospects - just as was the case for the Robarts' Plan students directed into worthless "vocational" tracks.

This re-positioning of the Transition Years students also serves as an example of being caught in the crossfire of party politics and fiscal agendas that really have nothing to do with ensuring a high quality education. Parents and teachers may also get caught in such crossfire, but as tax-payers, voters and union members, they do have at least some avenues to fight back. Students, the stakeholders who have least power but whose lives are most affected, are by far the most likely victims of cross-fire, and the more socially vulnerable the student group, the greater their danger. An explicit example is provided in a statement from the OBE chairperson. When squabbles between the ME and OBE about equalization payments affected 350 special education students attending Ottawa schools, but from outside the catchment area, he made the following accusations in a news release:

The Minister's actions today are reprehensible. He has chosen to use the most vulnerable students in our schools, those with special needs, as a bargaining chip....Even if the Minister proceeds on this most deplorable basis, the OBE will continue to educate these students to the end of this school year, June 1997.... However, beginning in September, 1997, the home boards of these students will
have to take back their students....imagine the disruption to the lives of these students and their families. Surely the Minister is above playing politics with the most vulnerable students (JC3).

Clearly the minister was not the only one using the students as “bargaining chips” and the concept of students as pawns can be found in various examples of subsequent counter discourse (OH1; OC47) such as the following comments of an Ottawa OAC student in a letter to the *Ottawa Citizen*:

Whom do I blame for this disgusting situation? The teachers? The Harris government? The Unions? I am left uninformed, wondering what is going on….What I do know is that the students are the ones who are suffering….How can we take action?…I do not enjoy being a pawn in this game….We are the last ones to be…listened to and I am sick and tired of being stepped on (OC47).

**Responses from the Front-line: Negotiating Tenuous Rights and Conflicted Responsibilities**

Given the contradictory, hierarchical placing of students, parents and teachers in an educational policy discourse that plays on social myths, prejudices, and assumptions, it is not surprising that Radwanski (1987 pp.88-90) found that the members of this triad held incongruent perceptions about one another.\(^{112}\) I suggest that the persistent dual positioning of these front-line stakeholders serves to deflect responsibility for poor outcomes away from the government that enacts the policies and onto the stakeholders themselves. Additionally, the good-bad dichotomy promotes divisive, oppositional groupings within and between each stakeholder group. In this way, the unequal power divisions among the supposed partners in the educational enterprise are reinforced and amplified, discouraging cooperation for oppositional action against government-endorsed policies.

\(^{112}\) Radwanski was concerned with the reasons that students drop out. He found ranked lists of causes were highly congruent for students and parents (boredom and dislike) whereas teachers cited family and behavioural problems (not mentioned at all by parents). What parents and students viewed as a preference for work, teachers perceived as economic need, or viewing education as unimportant.
Frankly, I find the degree of structural determination suggested by my research and reflected in the preceding overview and discussion, to be daunting. I do not consider it helpful to either minimize the constraints or romanticize the degree of resistance to these. Nevertheless, there is one way in which policy positions groups that I have not yet discussed - the way that groups or individual members choose to position themselves in response to the positioning that is imposed upon them. Although I cannot offer evidence to suggest the impetus of the educational structure can be readily re-directed, let alone revolutionized, as a former parent member on a SC I know, first-hand, that members of this triad are not passive recipients of reform rhetoric and policy changes. I had the opportunity to monitor the responses of teachers, parents and students to the unfolding of current educational policy. Chambers (1997) takes the position that in order to move towards long-term structural change we have to find ways to moderate and engage dominant and oppressive structures and processes in the short term using an unremitting engagement with challenge and change. During the period of this dissertation study members of the front line stakeholder groups seized every available opportunity and avenue at their disposal to critique and challenge the policy initiatives currently being implemented. Most often, the impact of these challenges was small, tenuous and not necessarily free of tensions among the front-line triad. They are, however, collective challenges and responses that mark mass education as a site of ongoing political struggle, and over time some highly significant battles have been won. As the subsequent examples demonstrate, the subordinated stakeholders do make choices about how to position themselves in response to dominant discourses and

113 This has been facilitated greatly by electronic networks not available in past periods of policy change. There is no doubt these make fast communication easier. Nevertheless, some of these kinds of exchanges doubtless occurred in past eras, and might be revealed by extensive archival research of local boards and their committees for example.
directives each using the resources and tactics and strategies available and best suited to their stakeholder role.¹¹⁴

**Teachers: Organizing the Challenge**

As members of federations with funds and local and provincial networks in place, teachers seem an obvious group of stakeholders to organize an oppositional response to undesirable educational reforms. A government intending to enact massive educational reforms is likely to need its teachers on side, and if excellence in education is truly the goal, why would teachers oppose them? This was not, however, the approach adopted by the Ontario government during the current reform period. Rather, the chosen tactic was to declare war from the outset, announcing in January 1996 that teachers (who had not had a raise in five years) should prepare for a pay cut (OC10). A month later, the government conducted a province wide poll that the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation (OSSTF) claimed was deliberately worded to provoke negative responses about teachers (OC11).

The response from teachers was surely predictable. A media war between the government and the teacher federations ensued. The federations were immediately active in disseminating information about the teacher perspective and in protesting the lack of government consultation with teacher groups (TF1-TF5). In addition, they attempted to bring their concerns to SCs and even directly to students via a “cutting out the heart of education,” Valentines Day campaign (HCSC2).¹¹⁵ In September 1997, after the introduction of legislation to restrict the right of teachers to strike and of school boards to control their localities, school resumed under the threat of a province-wide

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¹¹⁴ Of course, avenues and opportunities of response vary - "choices" may be constrained in many ways and I do not want to romanticise any aspect of this struggle. I can personally attest that it was exhausting and frustrating. I believe, however, that some avenues of response always exist even for students and thus what is often viewed as passive acceptance is itself a positioning choice.
teacher strike. By October, Snobelen was removed in a last ditch attempt by the government to resume talks. Incoming minister of education, David Johnson, failed to negotiate peace and a strike commenced, along with a government media campaign that subsequently led to a defamation suit from the teachers (OC6, 7, 9, 17-21-23,31). On the second day of the strike the government sought a court order to return the teachers to work, but this was denied (OC25a-d). After this victory, to the surprise of the public and the dismay of many teachers, the federations decided to end the strike in favour of alternative constitutional legal protests of Bill 160 (OC26, 27, 29, 30). In retrospect however, this strategy proved an effective tactic. In the moment of victory the teachers appeared reasonable and ready to negotiate whereas Johnson continued a confrontative stance, declaring that schools would not be allowed to keep the financial savings from the three week strike (OC28). This pushed school boards (already unhappy with Bill160) firmly onto the side of the teachers. In-depth media coverage of Bill160 (now often critical of the government) continued until it finally passed in December 1997 (OC29).

The war dragged on, mainly at the expense of the students, as teachers forced to teach longer with less preparation time, withdrew their participation in extra curricula activities. The attempt of the government to legislate such voluntary participation by defining it as co-curricula was clearly impossible to enforce, especially as school board trustees were also increasingly defiant as the government rammed through Bill 74 restricting trustee powers and right to dissent (OC38, 44; OCASC 2-5, 7; OCDSB4,7; NR13). Even the National Post declared “Teachers not Tories winning over public” (OCASC7). By May 2001, the government was forced to make concessions to the teachers and school boards regarding teaching time (OC49). This was a victory for the

115 These latter activities were somewhat controversial and provoked mixed responses from parent members of the Council (HCSC2).
teachers gained through unity with other stakeholder groups, but the struggle originated with the teachers’ organized response to the way they were negatively positioned in the OD of reform.

**Parents: Bridge-Building Partners**

School councils in Ontario were born into a highly politicized educational arena, especially at the secondary school level where there is traditionally less involvement of parents in daily school affairs. Parents of students in OBE schools had a pre-established record of high interaction with the board and an organized Joint Council of Parent-Teacher Associations (JC) that included a secondary school committee. The area was thus quick to establish and make use of the formalized status the new bodies provided and actively promoted networks and alliances among the parent members of the local councils. Prior to amalgamation the JC had on several occasions been successful in having the OBE endorse and advance its concerns to the ME, a method of extending the SC mandate of local input to obtain input to the ME itself (JC2). The JC promoted activism among member councils encouraging them to form committees to make group, as well as individual, responses to requests from the ME for public input (EE; CG). JC representatives also attended ME consultations in Ottawa reporting back that the ME bureaucrats seemed surprised and unprepared for the strong SC presence and critique.

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116 Parts of Bill 160 were later ruled unconstitutional (OC35).
117 The SC on which I sat, along with the SC of one of the schools participating in this study, were very active in establishing models and protocols for the area.
118 The CBE, with which the OBE amalgamated in 1998 also had a joint council. The cultures of the boards were, however, considered to be rather different. The CBE had a history of antagonistic relations with teachers and parents and was generally considered more conservative. OBE parents feared the CBE would set the tone for the new board and was proactive in organizing parent meetings and school "twinnings" between the two board SCs. My observation is that there was a period of adjustment during which both the OCDSB and OCASC were less oppositional to the ME, but this was clearly short lived given the current situation between the OCDSB and the ME.
119 It should be noted that the OBE had a particularly antagonistic relationship with the ME at this time and is was therefore, quite willing to "use" parent support against the ME. The OBE even printed a four page flyer challenging ME proposals and distributed it to the mailboxes of all OBE
Some small gains were won in curtailing proposals to extend co-op education and delay curriculum implementation time-lines (HCSC1) and objections to the exclusion of parents from the new Local Education Improvement Committees (LEICs) resulted in these committee meetings being public with an open question period and the inclusion of parents and other stakeholders on the committee, albeit as non-voting members (OBE6; JC7).

The SC on which I sat also attempted to build bridges among and between its teacher and student members. Most notably, a series of parent-facilitated student focus sessions were organized that allowed students to present concerns and requests about their school conditions. Parents encouraged students to present these matters (which primarily concerned control of space and teaching practices) to the Council in an organized and rational manner, and supported them where their case had merit.

The triumphs were, however, small and tenuous and the course of protest did not run smoothly for the parent groups. Interventions are not always well received, either at the school or board level. Although some teachers were highly supportive, not all approved of the focus groups and some were clearly annoyed if parents on the Council did not take their side in a matter.\textsuperscript{120} The school board was engaged in hostilities with the ME, which doubtless made it more appreciative of parent and teacher support, but even so the JC/OCASC sometimes encountered discouraging barriers as one JC chair reported concerning a budgetary dispute:

\begin{quote}
Last night's report from Joint Council was very negatively reviewed. I felt personally insulted by the comments and questions of the Trustees and even more insulted on behalf of Joint Council. To have one's integrity challenged openly and to have major issues...raised and endorsed by school councils dismissed or questioned as being illegitimate demonstrated a new low (JC10)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{120} The council I sat on enjoys supportive principals, which was not the case in all schools. During my time on council the parents were able to work democratically and negotiate differences of opinion successfully. Clearly this might not always be the case.
Another JC representative present at the same meeting concluded: “[a]gain, students are to suffer the consequences of the appalling performance of our trustees” (JC11). Similarly, despite repeated assertions that it was listening and responding to parents (NR14, 15; OH1, PP2), the ME responded to parent protests by dismissing them as the agendas of small interest groups (OC39, OH1).

Subsequently, two former JC/OCASC chairs have become trustees on the board that ultimately defied the ME over budget cuts, and it would seem that the seeds of activism may indeed have an extended growth period, with unpredictable long-term outcomes.

Students: Ringing Their Own Bells

As I previously pointed out, students have the least power in the stakeholder triad and the least opportunity to speak out. When they witness their more powerful parents and teachers disparaged and dismissed by school boards and the ME, they must surely feel even more helpless. Despite this, given the opportunity to speak, students will do so, and they have a lot to say. A CBC, Radio Noon phone-in show, with minister Snobelen (JC4), provided an excellent example of students engaging in discussions about policies and their in-practice implications. Teachers, other members of the public, and students all participated, but it was the students who directed the most virulent, articulate and unrelenting critique at the minister. ¹²¹ Under particular attack was the classification of some services as "non-classroom" expenditures (and thus not funding priorities). An OAC student summmed up the issue:

You say you want to reduce outside the classroom expenditures, but among these areas, you include teacher preparation time, library and guidance, and it has been my experience that these three do directly affect the classroom. And I

¹²¹ Of course, an acknowledgement of the hierarchies within the stakeholder groups necessitates questioning which students got to participate in this broadcast; who selected/organized them and how representative were they? But this is beyond the scope of this paper. Students were mainly from two schools, Etobicoke Collegiate and Lockerbie Composite HS, in Sudbury.
was wondering...how you can justify cutting areas such as these, while at the same time maintaining that you want to keep the quality in the classroom?”
(Alexandra Raymond, Etobicoke, JC4)

Other students hammered home the point. One young woman maintained that schools filthy with dust because maintenance costs were an expendable out of class cost, affected her health and thus her classroom environment. Others noted fees for note packages, lack of text books, curriculum changes, the impossibility of implementing some proposals given the current teacher-student ratio, and they questioned how libraries and student information centres could not be considered in-class supports (JC4).

Snobelen's responses first attempted to shift responsibility onto the school boards for poor budgeting:

Well, obviously, some of those comments I've heard in schools across Ontario, and that is one of the reasons why we've taken some of the actions that we're taking now....I was disappointed last year in some of the choices that a few boards made in...their allocation of their funds....

When callers and the show hosts persisted in arguing the point, he tried to deny the “non-classroom” categorization had ever come from his ministry:

...I'm not sure the distinctions mean that much....obviously a school needs to have an information centre, or library....I don't understand the emphasis on the distinction myself. These are models that were in existence long before this government came along ...and aren't necessarily reports that came out of our Ministry"

At this statement, even the Radio Noon host protested, “Oh, that's not....Ernst and Young says they got...the stuff from your Ministry,” but continuing to demonstrate considerable bureaucratic resistance to stakeholder critique, Snobelen informed one student (who protested that equalization payments had negatively impacted her school resources) that "there's a lot of misinformation...that's out there....And you may have been exposed to some of that” (JC4). Indeed - I think the students on the Radio Noon Show had grasped that quite well.
What Impact, This Context of Action?

This chapter raises many issues that beg a thorough discussion of social organization for activism and its outcomes that is far beyond the scope of this dissertation. My study focus is on the students’ experience of entering and exiting high school. The intent of this chapter is to provide at least a glimpse of the social context in which that took place. I have shown that the OD contains elements of agreement and contradiction and that students (along with their teachers and parents) are manipulated, but not unresisting, subjects of that discourse. Exercising agency by taking positions against policy initiatives and counter to negative images of incompetence to participate, does not necessarily lead to change, however - agents of the bureaucratic structure will re-position themselves and re-construct the "truth" in response.

The evidence I have provided above shows only that under some circumstances (and the Radio Noon show must be considered an exceptional circumstance) some students can and do think and speak critically about educational policies and reforms. We know nothing about the engagement of the average student in school with such matters because no one has asked about it. We need to know because students in school experience on a daily basis, the intersection of institutional structure with their personal exercise of agency. Their present, and all to often future, lived experience, is defined by the power institutional policy has to create and support stratified and hegemonic social relations. Yet, as Fullan (1991) states, adults rarely think of students as participants in organizational change.

Willing or unwilling, consciously or not, students are participants in educational reform – and they ultimately bear the consequences. The chaotic context of reform described above marked the high school experience of the students who took part in this dissertation study. This is especially true for those in Grade 9 whose transition from high school will also be steeped in the controversy and uncertainty of the ‘double cohort’
phenomenon. My research questions (see Chapter Three and Appendix B) therefore ask students about the reform context and explore the level of awareness they have regarding their negative re-positioning in the schooling-skills rhetoric. Given the extensive media coverage, complete oblivion is probably not a real cognitive option, so how do the students cope and respond? As Fullan 1991 asks, "what might happen if we treated the student as someone whose opinion mattered in the introduction and implementation of school reforms? (p.170). We do not know because we have not asked; so how do we ask?

In Chapter Three I turn to a consideration of methodology that can allow the researcher to confront, and yet negotiate, the conditions of a closed institution in order to engage students in research as if what they have to tell us really matters and we are actually listening.
CHAPTER THREE

Researching Agency, or Agency in Research?^{122}

The task in this chapter is to consider and evaluate the possibilities, the problems, and the ethical considerations entailed in actively involving students in research about their experiences of getting an education as they enter and exit high school. In Chapter One, I discussed not only the failure of much research to recognize adolescents as active social agents, but also the constraints on agency imposed by the structure of a closed institution, such as the high school. In Chapter Two, my consideration of the official discourse that sets the context of the educational process serves to underline the constraints and manipulations within which not only students, but also their teachers and parents, must strive for expressions of social agency.

These realities of the conditions of schooling pose quite a challenge to the social constructionist position that I presented in my Introduction. It is my view that the social constructionist approach entails a commitment to a research methodology that recognizes and supports the agency of those being researched. This means, at a minimum, allowing the participants to explain their actions directly, because it is their understanding that determines individual and collective decisions. It also requires recognition of the power dynamics that surround the research endeavour, especially when subordinated groups are involved. Other like-minded researchers have argued that participatory research methodology^{123} is a critical knowledge approach that allows sufficient innovation and depth (especially when qualitative methods are employed) to accommodate the social constructionist approach (Kelly, 1993; Morrow, 1994; Reason &

Participatory research recognizes (at least in theory) these power dynamics and addresses the inequitable treatment of subordinate groups by involving them in the research process and thus ensuring their voices are heard. A critical knowledge stance should not, however, assume that theoretical recognitions necessarily meet the realities of practice.

In this chapter, I first present the ideals of the participatory approach and then consider its viability within the structural constraints imposed by closed institutions such as the high school and the university. Next, I consider some current related debates in research methodology and argue for a flexible, multiple method research model that maximizes opportunities for the active collaboration of the research 'subjects.' Finally, I reflect on the successes and challenges of that model as I set it in motion to conduct my field research.

**Between the Idea and the Reality: Examining the Participatory Shadow**

**Troubling the Participatory Ideal**

Research taking a participatory approach encompasses a range of different international and disciplinary contributions to a vast body of literature, derives from a

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123 Research approaches considered "participatory" vary considerably and are called by a variety of names and I discuss this later in this chapter.

124 Reason and Bradbury (2001) essentially argue that a "structurationist" view of the world and a participatory research approach are integral to each other (pp.448-449). The assumption of a social constructionist world-view (as it is presented in the Introduction of this thesis) is increasingly apparent in participatory research literature (for example, the *Action Research Handbook* edited by Reason and Bradbury (2001)).

125 I prefer the term "multi-method" over the more traditional term "triangulation," or the recent use of "mixed methods." Language carries images and triangulation implies, three, and only three, angles in a closed geometric shape. Mixed-methods suggests confused and/or incorrect usage as in mixing metaphors or tenses. My position on multiple methods is most similar to that conveyed in Sorokin’s (1956) critique of the limitations of positivist approaches (p.50).

126 With acknowledgement to T.S. Eliot’s *The Hollow Men*: “Between the idea and the reality, between the motion and the act, falls the shadow.”
variety of disciplines, and employs different descriptive terms. This proliferation of terms can be confusing, as can various claims concerning the origins of the concept and use of participatory research approaches. However, as Reason & Bradbury (2001) point out, participatory research approaches derive from numerous academic disciplines and fields of practice making it impossible to present a definitive history. Despite the differences, there is fairly wide agreement that participatory research is a process with a socially transformative purpose that includes social investigation, education and action for change (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001; Hall, 1993, 2001; Maguire, 1987; Reason, 1994; Reason & Bradbury, 2001). The position that the process of creating social knowledge must be shared with members of the researched community (especially subordinated groups) is usually central to the concept of participatory research. This is necessary in order to challenge the hierarchy of knowledge and of ‘knowers’ (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001; Hall, 1993; Kelly, 1993; Maguire, 1987; Park, 1993; Simonson & Bushaw, 1993; Reason, 1994). According to Maguire, participation in the creation of knowledge is essential “to develop critical consciousness, to improve the lives of those involved in the research process, and to transform fundamental societal structures and relationships” (p.3).

Some of these are participatory action research (PAR), participatory (or rapid) rural assessment (PRA and RRA), action research (AR), transformative research, and collaborative research. See Chambers (1994) for PRA and RRA, Reason (1994) for the use of variety of these terms, and Reason & Bradbury (2001) for a discussion of this issue and examples of the differing applications in practice.

Despite the welcome reconciliatory arguments and evaluative framework offered by Reason & Bradbury (2001), there remains a debate about what actually qualifies as participatory research. Arguments tend to be located in the abstract realm focusing on terminology and different theoretical underpinnings rather than on a critical analysis of actual field achievements. Reason contends that the true principles of action research necessitate a concern “with the transformation of organizations and communities towards greater effectiveness and greater justice” (1994 p.49). Researchers using the term PAR (participatory action research) argue however, that there is a distinction between endeavours which are merely action research and those which incorporate participatory principles (Brown & Tandon, 1983; Kelly, 1993; Maguire, 1987; Siminson & Bushaw, 1993). I use the PAR literature as the ideal model for my comparison purposes. However, in reviewing abstracts and papers claiming either AR or PAR methods, I have noted that in practice, the emphasis is often on greater program effectiveness with minimal consideration for issues of
In the ideal participatory model, members of the researched community participate from inception to conclusion of the project. The community identifies the matters to be researched and is involved in designing, conducting dissemination and putting into action the research components (Chisholm, 2001; Hall, 2001; Heron & Reason, 2001; Whyte & Greenwood, 1991). Some authors have contended that ideally all involved should be from the researched community with no outside ‘expert’ permitted, but others see the involvement of an outside research expert as virtually inevitable (Hall, 1993; Park, 1993; Whyte & Greenwood, 1991) or even preferable (Erickson, 1995; Kelly 1993; Kelly, Mock & Tandon, 2001). Insisting on an ‘insider’ researcher is often impractical and generally the extreme view has given way to a position that advocates community members and outside experts be viewed as co-researchers with different knowledge capitals to share (Reason & Heron, 2001; Whitmore & Mckee, 2001). Although Reason and Bradbury (2001) still advance the theoretical ideal as an admirable goal, they underline the need to evaluate every research context for what is both possible and appropriate to each set of circumstances. As yet, the debate about what constitutes an adequate participatory approach remains primarily theoretical and little of the literature offers a critical examination of the degree to which reported studies met (or failed to meet) the ideal.\footnote{In the conclusion of the \textit{Handbook of Action Research} (which only became available after the completion of my dissertation field work) Reason & Bradbury (2001) offer an evaluative frame for just this purpose, and I refer to this in my discussions of methodological implications at the conclusion of this dissertation.}

The participatory ideal is laudable, but considered carefully from a practice perspective it contains many ethical and practical implications that would be challenging for any research project to meet completely. When the actions of some members of the greater justice for subordinate groups and this is particularly true where institutions such as prisons, hospitals and schools are concerned. It is quite common to read of a PAR initiative to change the treatment of patients or students that does not include any form of consultation with those groups. On the other hand, some action research is more radical in its participatory elements and transformative aims than much PAR (e.g. Eldon, 1981; Pace & Argona, 1991).
potential research community site are tightly controlled (which is not uncommon among oppressed or subordinated populations) the participatory ideal is probably impossible to achieve. A considerable number of questions arise, beginning with what exactly is meant by ‘participation’ and ‘transformative outcomes’? Recent discussions (particularly of inter-organizational collaborative research) have tackled the latter part of this question far more clearly than the former. Considerations of the complexities of structure, power dynamics and change have replaced Marxist visions of imminent transformation, providing a more nuanced and moderate agenda for action for change (Chambers, 1997; Erickson, 1995; Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001; Rao et al, 1997; Reason & Bradbury, 2001). In this view, structural change is an ongoing struggle requiring simultaneous collaborative action at multiple levels. Gaventa & Cornwall (2001) point out that PAR has been criticized for “offering a broad analysis of social power relations without clear starting points for change at the micro and personal level” (p.73). They argue that there also needs to be an emphasis on the intermediate (meso) level of social relations that examines power dynamics in the organization and group as a mediating point between individual power and broader social relationships. Such a view is clearly appropriate to the situation of the student-agent interacting in a site (or sites) of the meso level school district, which in turn is situated within, and acts as an agent of, the macro institution of education.130

The view of change for social transformation described above, while not free of tensions, does at least makes the action ideals of participatory research more viable in

130 This raises some rather interesting questions about the level at which to consider the school. Traditionally, the classroom has been considered the micro site of interaction, and the school as a meso-level community site. But students interact as individuals throughout the school site and the school is a micro unit of the larger school board district. On the other hand, as seen in Chapter Two, schools, especially through school councils, network and definitely act as meso mediators, some times in association with their board, but at other times in opposition to it. This suggests to me there is still a lot of thinking to be done about the complexities of ‘structuration.’
terms of practice goals. The questions about participation in this action remain, however. If the participatory ideal “involves the full and active participation of the community in the entire research process” (Hall, 2001 p.173) then there are a lot of practical questions for the research model to address. How can an entire community participate? In what exactly, and for how long? If only some members are involved in the entire process then which ones will that be? Even if the community can identify the issues for social inquiry and change and has done so, how may it proceed from within if some of those issues are the lack of research and social development knowledge, or the lack of resources (including freedom) to pursue that inquiry?

There are few answers and a lack of specific, interactive discussion about these questions. Examination of the literature shows that full participation of members of the researched group in every component of the research process (from identifying the research issue to reporting the results) is rare. In fact, participatory researchers do not have a stellar record of even ‘seeing’ all community members. Maguire (1987, 2001) highlights the failure to include women in many participatory studies, and Kelly (1993) makes the same point concerning children and adolescents. Furthermore, the divisions of power among such subordinated groups, while noted and discussed by some researchers (Chambers, 1997; Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001; Kelly, 1993; Kelly et al, 2001) are still not well absorbed into the theoretical and practice literature (Maguire, 2001). The deep-rooted assumptions that lead to such oversights I have discussed in the preceding two chapters.

Although I concur with a more realistic, step-by step theory of the dynamic struggle to effect constructive social change (see Stratton & Jackson, 2001), I also have some qualms about the framework Reason & Bradbury offer for evaluating what counts as transformative action. Based on my own concerns about the action component of the present study (discussed later in this chapter and the Conclusion) I feel it may be too tempting to take solace in small, individual changes in consciousness. I think perhaps there is a danger of moving from the impossible ideal to something that allows any participatory attempt (no matter how short of that ideal) to be counted as valid action.
Recent literature focusing on collaboration has begun to confront these issues and challenge the very notion of what constitutes collaboration or participation, who should decide what form it should take, and how much of it is possible or desirable and to whom (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2002; Hansen et al, 2001; Kelly, et al, 2001; Rose & Stratton (in progress); Whitmore & McKee, 2001). This literature addresses the structural power dynamics that make it more or less likely that some community members can and will participate. It also suggests that even those who can freely choose to participate have their own understandings of what it means to do so. They have different reasons and agendas for becoming involved (or not doing so), and for defining and limiting the amount and kind of participation they are able or willing to offer. Even where members of a researched group have initiated the project, not all members will be sufficiently free of other life-commitments to participate actively in every stage of the process, even if they had (or wished to acquire) the skills to do so. The need to earn a living, provide care to family members, pursue other community and work activities, and to rest and relax, are all constraints on possible participation. Available time is a factor and so is the opposition to the research issue of an employer or family member. Any of these factors may prohibit even minimal active participation, no matter how much personal interest and belief in the usefulness of the project an individual might hold. The more powerless the individuals (e.g., institutionalized students, prisoners, etc.), the less likely they can either initiate or take a highly active role in a participatory project. In addition, when it actually comes to introducing community change, members may represent different structural and cultural perspectives, concerns and agendas. As well, Gaventa & Cornwall (2001) point out that just because knowledge is ‘local’ does not mean that it is free of replications of dominant discourses. Glossing over these participation issues leads to an “illusion of inclusion,” placing a democratic face on knowledge no more
representative of what ‘the people’ really want than mainstream research, but endowing it with an apparent moral authority that is hard to challenge (p.75).

No matter what theoretical position individual researchers take, or how they put into practice the concepts of participation and transformation, the literature abounds with accounts of projects that have failed to achieve the participatory ideal. Those who have insisted on real and full participation throughout the process (or most of it) underline the problems of hierarchies of power among research participants, especially where institutions or organizations are involved in the collaborative process (Comstock & Fox, 1993; Kelly et al, 2001; Maguire, 1993; Suschnigg, 1992; Whitmore, 1994, 2001).

My review of the participatory literature suggests that the participatory ideal is rarely (if ever) completely achievable in practice. It is, therefore (as Reason & Bradbury (2001) suggest), perhaps better to conceive of it as an ideal model by which to measure the practical possibilities and restraints, and the successes and shortcomings of any participatory project. But how then should we categorize projects that recognize this, but still set out to maximize the involvement of a researched community? Reason & Bradbury (2001) have taken the position that the labels matter less than the process, and this seems a reasonable argument from the point of view of practice. On the other hand, language does matter, and the words we use carry presumed connotations.¹³² In fact, the dictionary term “to participate” means only “to take part,” a requirement satisfied by merely filling out a survey. To collaborate, however, involves working with another on a joint project and also allows a possible element of subversiveness (for positive or

¹³² I am empathetic to a position that is impatient with academic wrangling over exactly what some disciplinary term or other does, or does not mean. At the same time, I think my discussions in Chapters One and Two tend to underscore the dangers of buried assumptions attached to catch phrase terms. Further, the importance of shared collaborative understandings is emerging in my current work with the Civil Justice System and the Public project (Rose & Stratton, in progress).
negative ends). I find, therefore, that the latter term holds more conceptual strength for evolving research models that meet the needs of the complexity and uneven power dynamics of the social constructionist’s world. From this point on, I therefore refer to a “collaborative research model.” Using this conceptualization, I can aim at a research design that acknowledges and confronts the constraints of the closed institution as research site, but still aims to maximize the direct involvement of students in the creation of knowledge about their own experiences of this social context.

**Evaluating the Realities of Institutional Restraints**

If the participatory ideal is unrealistic, then the question that needs to be asked is what is the best collaborative model attainable within the constraints of the research setting? To recap on the closed institution characteristics of the high school (discussed at length in Chapters One and Two), each of the elements Goffman describes (1961) is a specific impediment to implementing the participatory research ideal.

The high school is an institution that purports to perform an instrumental task (the provision of education). Its operation is overseen by a body of officials (the Ministry of Education and its associated school boards) that use a system of explicit formal rulings to control all phases of daily activities. Its task is seen as both necessary for the protection of the future community (social and economic stability etc.) and the interim protection of the student ‘inmates’ (primarily from themselves). To these ends, the movement and behaviour of students, supervising teachers, and visiting outsiders are highly controlled. The daily activities of the school are tightly scheduled and take place in organized batches (known as classes) that are treated as homogeneous blocks moved around by the staff (usually teachers). Between this large managed student group and

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133 I engage in a more elaborate discussion of definitions of “collaboration” in Rose & Stratton (in progress). For some discussions of the shadow side of the notion of collaboration see Erickson (1995) and Kelly et al (2001).
the proportionally small staff, there is a status-split marked by narrow, hostile stereotypes. Interaction across status boundaries has a special tone that privileges the staff but disparages students, who are not regarded as competent social agents and are excluded from the decision process regarding their fate. The subordination of the students is systematically reinforced by institutional practices (lockers searched; property confiscated; clothing prescribed; permission required to meet basic physical needs) that encourage the students to psychologically adopt the institutional view of themselves.

Fairly clearly, the egalitarian transformative goals of the participatory research ideal are at odds with the maintenance of such a system, and if these are fully understood by those who uphold the systemic status quo the prospective researcher should expect institutional resistance. Under these conditions, initiation of research by a subordinate group insider is not likely, and an outsider may be regarded as a potential threat by inmates as well as staff. Even traditional research processes may be reviewed as disruptive to institutional routine, and any attempt at collaboration will likely increase the level of disruption and time investment required from staff and inmates. The movements of visitors who do gain access are generally highly controlled to ensure they do not ask embarrassing questions or breach institutional etiquette (staff or inmate, official or unofficial). The preference is that they be confined to special institutional ceremonies and displays where the compliance of both visitors and inmates can be monitored and maintained.

If permission to enter into research is somehow procured, the outside researcher can expect to find, in addition to the conditions just described, that inmates have developed a

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134 My focus in this study is the high school, but the points of the discussion are applicable to any tightly controlled organization.
subversive counter-culture involving some degree of solidarity that may support brief mass defiance, but more often involves subtler forms of non-compliance and disruption (such as the examples discussed in Chapter One). Within the sub-culture, individuals will adopt different cognitive strategies to cope with the institutional power and these run the span between flagrant rebellion and total acceptance.

Tight control on all aspects of these conditions is, however, hard to maintain constantly and as Goffman (1961) amplifies and draws out in his discussion, they also contain tensions and contradictions which can be utilized as “cracks in the wall” to gain entry to the institution and to the inmates. A few published accounts of participatory research attempts within prisons and schools help to illustrate both the constraints and possibilities of breaking in through these cracks (Apple, 1993; Kelly, 1993; Maruyama, 1981).

Maruyama (1981) not only gained access to prisoners but actually involved some of them as interviewers in a participatory research attempt. He reports that these collaborating prisoners were quite capable of learning efficient interview and recording techniques, and much more effective at gaining the confidence of other prisoners than an outside researcher could possibly have been. The result was data that captured the prisoners’ own conceptualizations of what precipitated violent incidents, and these perceptions differed from those of guards and prison administrators. Maruyama emphasizes these successes but does not address whether the research results led to any long-term structural changes, or a transformation of the prisoners’ violent interactions. He notes, but does not dwell on, nor explore, tensions around who should

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135 Even initiation by the teaching staff without outside support and assistance is difficult (Hansen et al, 2001) and most teacher action research involves the support of a University Faculty of Education.

136 It is unclear on what evidence Maruyama bases that conclusion. Rigorous evaluation of the interviewer effect in qualitative research is problematic as each interview constitutes a unique social interaction.
be chosen as an interviewer and the danger of harassment and abuse of the interviewers by other prisoners and guards because of their participation. He also acknowledges that administrative harassment of any component of the project was considered threatening by all participants, who generally perceived dangers in revealing some information to other inmates and/or to guards. Thus, although the prisoners’ views might have been better represented than if no participatory attempt was made, there seem to be some important unanswered questions about both the validity of the data and the ethical appropriateness of exposing prisoner-researchers to potential harm.

Maruyama (1981) does not say whether the prisoners, especially the interviewers, suffered negative repercussions after the outside researcher withdrew, but Apple (1993), Herr (1995), and Kelly (1993) all suggest that considering issues of subsequent repercussions should be of major importance to researchers involved in participatory projects with institutions such as prisons and schools. Apple (1993) introduced a radical-action pedagogical project into a female adolescents’ detention centre. His aim was to involve the inmates in a participatory process to produce films on issues they chose. The initiative was a great success with the young woman, many of whom were literally transformed by their involvement. However, when the centre administration became aware of the content of some of the films, they shut the project down. Apple has been subsequently tormented by the damage and pain he may have caused by briefly raising the consciousness, and re-kindling the hope, of these young women as they expressed their personal agency, only to see structural powers dash it down a moment later.

Kelly (1993) expresses similar concerns at the conclusion of the participatory project she initiated in a continuation high school offering an alternative program for students who had previously dropped out (or were close to doing so). Student co-researchers had no difficulty in identifying some policy initiatives they would like to see implemented, including the opportunity to promote to junior high students the continuation program as
a positive alternative choice to a mainstream school. School administrators were not supportive of this view, but did like the idea of peer counsellors who would encourage mainstream students to stick with the system rather than end up like the continuation students. Kelly had the disconcerting experience of watching her co-researchers re-positioned into failures once again, and of hearing them push a mainstream approach on younger students when she knew they had earlier voiced substantive critiques and arguments against the very same program. The peer-counselling project folded soon after her departure from the school and Kelly reflects that:

One danger in seeking to implement action plans that are too ambitious or likely to be blocked by those who hold more power is that students may become pessimistic or cynical about the possibility of change (p.24)

This example raises issues about both maintenance of changed individual conscience and cooptation and distorted application of alternative knowledge perspectives. Kelly also raises concerns related to the power among participants. She comments that she had “naively assumed an abstract equality among all the students” (p.21), but in fact, power relations along racial and gender lines (and combinations of these) existed among the participatory group. The issues of some students took precedence over those of others and in particular, concerns of minority students about racism were not included in the questionnaire that was finally administered to the larger student body. Furthermore, it became apparent that some of the student interviewers pressured respondents into providing answers that were supportive of the

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137 In Herr (1995) racism was the focus of the project. Herr discusses the threats of reprisal the participant students experienced, which eventually escalated the project and its concerns into the attention of the community at large.

138 Kelly’s student participants were in a remedial education program often because of lower than average literacy achievements and this affected their note-taking ability. They were originally selected by teachers. She does not think they were generally more successful in creating rapport with the other students than an adult would have been. In some cases she thinks the status lines (such as racial identities) between various student groups was probably detrimental (Personal communication, January 7, 1997).
research group’s pre-defined ideas and positions. In retrospect, Kelly concluded she should have taken a more authoritative educative role regarding issues such as racism.

The above examples illustrate that designing and implementing a collaborative approach to research in a high school setting entails may challenges for any researcher, both practical and ethical. When the researcher contemplating such a project is a graduate student, yet another layer of institutional constraints must also be taken into account. In fact, Heaney (1993) has argued that the structural conditions of the university make it impossible, from the outset, for graduate students or junior faculty to conduct participatory research successfully. He maintains that the very nature of the game requires that the doctoral student must have control over the research project, a factor at odds with participatory research principles. As well, the doctoral student’s work is strictly controlled by structural factors (program requirements, committee demands, interests, funding, allowable conclusions, timing, and so on) that do not allow the kind of innovation and flexibility required for successful collaboration.

Graduate students do, nevertheless, undertake participatory ventures, and university programs are sometimes devoted to encouraging just that (Reason & Marshall, 2001). After all, is not a primary purpose of graduate studies to challenge the edges of present knowledge? Surely attempts to do so should be encouraged and supported rather than admonished? Heaney’s concerns are, nevertheless, substantive and cannot be lightly dismissed. Graduate students pursuing participatory research also speak from their own experience of both ethical dilemmas and personal academic risk (Kelly et al, 2001; Maguire, 1993; Suschnigg, 1992). To accept Heaney’s position is, however, untenable for two main reasons. First, to accept that the structural conditions of the university (or any other institution) are inalterable is too deterministic and would immobilize any action towards social change. Secondly, such a position is not historically supportable; if it were, the structural operation of the university would never have
changed sufficiently to admit the previously excluded (e.g., women, minorities, and former high school drop-outs), and no contesting or critique of positivist methods and dominant knowledge forms would have ever emerged. Rather, as Kelly (1993) argues, researchers in general have to confront the difficulties and imperfections of attempting to use power-with models in a society that operates on a power-over understanding (p.23). Those “located within institutions that bestow formal power on them” (p.21) are usually the ones to initiate collaborative projects because they have greater access to the various resources needed for organizing and conducting research projects. In such structural conditions, researchers can “never stop being authorities or having authority” (p.21) and if they do not act to make changes in knowledge production, little is likely to be initiated, especially in the case of schools (and prisons and hospitals) where access to potential participants is strictly controlled and must be mediated in the first place.

With these arguments kept in mind, I turn now to the task of developing a research model innovative and flexible enough to allow high school students to collaborate in producing knowledge about their experiences of “getting an education.”

**Maximizing Collaboration: Choosing Appropriate Methodologies**

Philosophical discussions about the best way to conduct scholarship, and intense debates concerning the merits of various approaches to conducting research, are a hallmark of the sociological perspective. In particular, the post-modern critique of traditional sociology has provoked increased epistemological challenge and reflection as it demands methods that can accommodate a fragmented social world consisting of myriad subjectivities and no shared truth. If there is any basis at all for collective knowledge it certainly cannot be conveniently explained by grand theory or elegant causal modelling (Gartrell & Gartrell, 1996). Positivist methods have come under vociferous attack (Cook & Fonow, 1990; Gartrell & Gartrell, 1996; Schwager, 1988, 1991),
but as Gartrell & Gartrell (1996) point out, are far from dead. Oppositional debates about
the relative advantages of quantitative and qualitative methodology continue, with some
authors taking the position that only qualitative approaches are compatible with a
participatory philosophy (Morrow, 1994). Others have long argued that a synthesis of
methods is needed to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the social world (Cook &
Fonow, 1990; Eichler, 1987; Richer, 1975; Sorokin, 1956). This perspective takes the
position that it is the application of the method, rather than the type that should be of
concern. Qualitative data may be as biased, invalid, or inadequate as quantitative, and
vice versa. Increasingly, this position has been adopted by participatory researchers who
argue that the methods must be selected with sensitivity to each research context, and
that the choosing of the methods is critical to the quality of the research outcomes
(Reason & Bradbury, 2001). There must also be flexibility and openness to change as
the project progresses (Whitmore & McKee, 2001; Torbet, 1981).

I am personally convinced by these arguments for selecting appropriate and
multiple method designs, and therefore chose this approach for my dissertation
research. As already discussed, the high school setting of this research and my
position as a doctoral student placed constraints on developing a collaborative process.
The research design must of necessity precede my contact with the students who would
participate, as I must convince first my committee, and then the school boards of the
value of the project. I thus had to rely primarily on previous knowledge in choosing
appropriate methods.

139 Morrow (1994) is of the opinion that only intensive (qualitative) methods allow sufficient
innovation and depth for critical theory research, although he also acknowledges that quantitative
approaches may have some peripheral usefulness to critical theory research, which is “eclectic,”
embraces “the possibility of all empiricist techniques,” and is methodologically open and
innovative (p.227).
140 I have been fortunate in receiving considerable mentorship, training, and practice in applying
such an approach, which is reflected in a variety of work with which I am associated (Hansen et
al, 2001; Lowe & Stratton, 2002; Stratton, 1994; Stratton & Jackson (forthcoming); Stratton &
Torbet (1981), specifically addressing problems with educational research, offers six suggestions that seem important to developing a collaborative inquiry with students: 1) the researcher's activities are also observed and noted; 2) initiating variables are not entirely pre-defined and may change through dialogue; 3) interruptions are not treated as irrelevant inconveniences, but as positive shocks to increase the researcher's awareness of the issues; 4) conflicts between different models of reality are anticipated and welcomed as tests of the validity of research assumptions, and as having intellectual, emotional, and practical implications concerning the construction of new knowledge; 5) Validity is determined by the pertinence of the data to the issues and the ability to increase understanding and effective responses to them; 6) the interest is in generating knowledge uniquely relevant to the particular time and place of the research, and interest in generalizability is concerned with the lives of the participants (pp.147-149). Tesson & Youniss (1995) offer two additional points relevant to designing research about the social world of children and adolescents. It is necessary to understand their perspective of, and influence on, the different relationships and actions in which they are involved; and to simultaneously remember that although structural conditions “do not determine developmental outcomes in some mechanical

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141 Arguments for a reflexive-evaluative approach to assessing the validity of qualitative, and multiple method research are becoming quite widely adopted (Chambers, 1997; Dingwall, 1997; Reason & Bradbury, 2001). Key to this is the degree of resonance with the researched group. Wadsworth (2001) sums up the underlying point: "It has struck me that there is a certain irony in...the repeated criticism of participatory action research as 'easy,' 'lacking in rigour' and 'unscientific...given that it drew on every store of knowledge, experience, logic, evidence-based reasoning, record-keeping and retrieval, writing capacities and emotional intelligence that I had, not to mention stretched me to almost indescribable limits of personal endurance." (p.430). I concur—there are easier ways to meet academic requirements! Designing methods that can handle the conditions of participatory theory and the realities of practice requires a rigour beyond that demanded of traditional research. Reflections on the criteria Torbet outlines, as well as the evaluative criteria offered by Reason & Bradbury (2001, p.454), are provided in the dissertation Conclusion).

142 This last point is essentially a condemnation of positivist tests of 'reliability,' which may find an instrument reliable and generalizable because it consistently gets the same response, regardless of how meaningless and invalid that response may be.
way…. [children] are subject to the very real power that adults hold over them and the developmental avenues that are open to them” (p.116).

Using these points as a guiding frame I selected the following combination of methods: textual analysis of policy and reform documents; participant observation as a school council parent representative and as a researcher within a research site; a primarily quantitative questionnaire for use with selected student cohorts; and in-depth recursive style interviews with a student sub-group randomly selected from the questionnaire respondents. I will discuss the reasons for these selections in a frame that also looks critically at the collaborative possibilities their application permitted. In the remainder of this chapter I consider these details within each stage of the collaborative research process: deciding the research agenda; designing the research instruments; collecting the data; analyzing the data; disseminating the knowledge; and action for change.

Deciding the Research Agenda

In the collaborative ideal, the researched community identifies its own research issues and the research team comes from within the community (or at the very least the community would select the researcher). The best insider possibility for students in high school is that a concerned teacher with some research background will facilitate research on their concerns, but the power dynamics and institutional constraints present in this option are obvious. An outside researcher is quite possibly both necessary and preferable to populations with inmate status, especially in terms of ensuring their anonymity and protection from reprisal.

In theory, an outside collaborative researcher should ask the insider population what research agenda to adopt, but in a closed institution this is unlikely to occur because of the requirement for pre-approved entry that generally demands details on all aspects of the research project and an inclusion of components that are of interest to the
granting authorities. Further, when the research is to form the substance of a doctoral thesis, the research issue must also be deemed academically worthy, gain supervisory support, and pass university ethics regulations. How then could I even begin to identify an agenda that was of interest and importance to high school students?

The social constructionist position does allow for the identification of research issues via the recognition of gaps in present knowledge, and the discussion in Chapter One sufficiently demonstrates academic worthiness. The nature of the gap (students’ own perspectives) does rather strongly suggest it might also be of concern to students, but this is not the same as first hand confirmation. I was fortunate in being able to gain such confirmation from several sources: previous field research in high schools (Stratton, 1994) had allowed me to talk in depth with students, thus providing insight into their concerns; there were two high school students living in my household during my doctoral studies who were informed and invaluable collaborators from the outset; I was a member of a local school council and could therefore get “inside” on a regular basis to observe at least some of what occurred; I was part of a participatory network that included high school teachers (see Hansen et al, 2001) who facilitated interactions with students prior to the implementation of my own field work. All of these opportunities contributed in various ways to my overall methodology.

Significantly, while completing the preliminary requirements of my PhD program, I was able to be a part of student focus groups and a guest in several sessions of an Ontario Academic Credit (OAC) social science class. In the latter case, the students’

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143 Which is not to say that there should not be a process to protect potential research participants from unethical inquiry. These processes tend to be concerned with institutional rules than the concerns of the institutional population, however. Furthermore the processes that do exist to accommodate research are based on a traditional model and are inflexible.

144 Other members of school council were informed of my research activities, as were any students with whom I interacted as primarily a school council member.

145 University entrance year in Ontario (currently being phased out). Students are typically preparing for their transition from high school and usually expecting to go to university.
collaboration in the development of my research questions and instruments was facilitated by a teacher committed to participatory research methodology and was usefully related to their course curriculum.

These collective interactions with students confirmed that they shared with academic researchers a perception that transitions into and out of high school were key social-development events. Also confirmed was the frustration students felt at seldom being consulted about the educational process and experience. Informed by these student contributions, and based on the driving research issue, “what is the student experience of the process we call getting an education?” three broad research questions and (for want of a better term) their operational components, were presented to both my academic committee and the school boards:

1. **What is the social context of education in which students construct their world-views?**
   - *What is/are the official (dominant) discourse(s) of education reflected in policy documents/directives?*
   - *How are students (and the teachers and parents with whom they interact) constructed/positioned within this discourse?*
   - *How is the dominant discourse reflected in records of the discourses of non-dominant stakeholder groups (parents, teachers, students?) Do disjunctures exist?*

2. **What are the world-views high school students have concerning the educational process?**
   - *How do they explain the educational choices they have made or are about to make?*
   - *What expectations and aspirations for their future do they hold?*
   - *How do they describe their experiences of the transition into and out of high school?*
   - *What opinion do they have concerning the adequacy of their education to help them achieve their aspirations and generally prepare them for participation in the adult world?*
   - *What opinions do they hold about educational policies and proposed educational reforms?*

3. **What are the relationships between the social context of education and the students' views?**
   - *What (if any) themes are common to official and student discourses about education?*
• What differences (tensions, distortions, re-interpretations etc.) exist between the accounts?
• How do students relate macro and school level policies to their personal experiences of school?
• What (if any) common themes are evident in the accounts of students in general? Are certain themes common among some groups of students, but not others (e.g., by gender, grade, ethnic background, achievement level)?

The first research question acknowledges the social constructionist position that the students’ knowledge cannot be considered outside the larger social context in which it occurs. It is addressed by the textual analysis of policy and reform already discussed and presented in Chapter Two. It should be noted in this regard that a particular emphasis on the discourse and constructions of current reform emerged as a result of originally unanticipated social conditions that were beyond my control. That is, the political agenda of the moment also influenced the context and setting of the research agenda.

The second question broadly frames the issues to be explored directly with the students and inquires into the degree of agency and/or constraint they perceive and exercise in the educational process. The third question suggests the analytical-interpretative knowledge the data might be expected to inform. Although these questions broadly define the research agenda, they do not rigidly determine it. Foremost, they are questions and not hypotheses that pre-suppose certain answers. Further, they allow flexible approaches to gaining answers via different methodological approaches.

The framing research questions required both flexibility and definition because both school board and university procedures demand that certain parameters of a study be pre-defined before permission to conduct it is granted. In setting a collaborative

146 I think that this probably happens in some degree to most research agendas, but perhaps in less obvious ways that are overlooked by the researcher. The political ‘flavour’ of the moment influences what is funded, what kind of access may or may not be allowed, who is chosen to conduct the research, and so on.
research agenda as a doctoral student, there is a constant tension between what such an agenda demands versus what is acceptable and ‘doable’ within the context of dissertation research. One factor that had to be decided early on, and which reflects this tension, was the scope of the study. Attaining a random sample of students is essentially impossible for a researcher not employed by the MET or a local school board. Even when that is the case, the full compliance of school staff and students is difficult to gage. A purposive sampling process was therefore used. In order to provide a reasonably representative range of students attending Ottawa high schools, it was necessary to include public and Catholic boards and several schools in different areas of the city. Four varied sites were selected, but the number of expected participants had to remain flexible as access to students could not be guaranteed. Subsequent interviews needed at an absolute minimum to include equal numbers of male and female students from each site and each grade. Representation of a range of academic achievement and cultural diversity was also desirable. These considerations, which were mutually collaborative and academic, encouraged a research agenda that was ambitious in terms of the amount of support resources actually available.

**Designing the Research Instruments**

The involvement of the OAC students via full class and focus group discussions contributed substantially to the design of the research instruments. In my previous work with students I had successfully used a combination of questionnaire and in-depth recursive style interview. The advantages of this combination are several: a greater number of students can participate than would be the case if only in-depth interviews were used; the questionnaire can provide background information (via demographics, general opinions and choices) that gives context to the qualitative accounts; the qualitative data can explain what lies behind trends that quantitative data reveal; and last
(but probably not least when dealing with a closed institution), quantitative research approaches are more familiar to organizational authorities and they are more readily convinced of their utility. Students, however, are subjected to many surveys and tests and may not engage with them in a constructive or honest fashion. I asked the OAC students what they thought about these issues. What I learned was that I would need to explain to students why completing the questionnaire was of interest to them. The OAC students thought this would be quite easy as the questions they had helped develop asked them about themselves and their daily lives in school.

During this first round of collaboration most actual input focused on the questionnaire design, although the idea of the recursive interview was explained and the main areas of the interview schedule were identified from the same issues that also informed the questionnaire development. The consensus was that the interviews were a great idea because most students would love the opportunity to have an adult listen to them for an hour! In-depth interviews are not necessarily empathetic, however, and may be experienced as an interrogation, especially when the interviewer has some

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147 See Appendix C for the final version of the questionnaire and the interviewer’s guide.
148 This is changing somewhat, especially in the private sector where, in some quarters, there is a recognition of both action approaches and qualitative data (see the various examples in Reason & Bradbury, 2001). I wonder, personally if it is the usefulness of quantitative data that is recognized, or a sense that it is generally not focused and meaningful enough to be viewed as directly threatening in the same way that talking to ‘inmates’ is so perceived. The students I talked to certainly did not hold surveys in high esteem. They were cynical about the type of question typically put to them and had a fairly sophisticated understanding of the mechanical analysis process. They were inclined to believe that most researchers just entered and interpreted the numerical data blind to possible bias and inaccuracy. They were not, however, blind to the possibilities of a survey that asked the right questions and was properly analysed.
149 I needed to consider previous work of course. I drew on some past studies for often used questions, both to test them by having the students generate qualitative responses, and to engage them in discussions about the effectiveness of a closed-end form. Some of the previous studies that informed my work are: Kelly, 1988; Krahn & Lowe 1991; Looker, 1997, 1998; Stratton, 1994; and a variety of questionnaires used with adolescents in Ontario between 1985 – 1995, by the Centre for Research in Human Development, Laurentian University).
150 Although focus groups were used in the collaboration process, this method was not considered ideal for use in the main research. The collaborators thought they might work with senior students, but not younger ones. My observation during the collaboration sessions was that some students did not fully participate in the discussions and that gender and age dynamics exacerbated this problem.
power over the interviewee. Even when the intention is benevolent and egalitarian, interviewing styles which are suggestive not only result in data contamination, but set a (hidden) agenda for what participants are allowed to talk about.\(^{151}\) The choice of a recursive interview style rests on my conviction that it maximizes the participation of the person being interviewed, while minimizing the amount of bias in question design, delivery, and interpretation of interview data.

Recursive interviewing relies on a semi-structured schedule of broad, neutrally phrased research questions related to the topic of inquiry. Although the schedule covers the same basic questions, the order and phrasing may be adjusted to accommodate different contexts among participants. For example, given my current interest in students’ perceptions of their agency in school transitions, the opening question for Grade 9 students was, “what has it been like moving into high school?”\(^{152}\) The interview is allowed to develop dependant on the actual answers supplied and the participant is encouraged to exhaustively explore his or her thinking on the matter under consideration. As the interviewer uses neutral and minimal prompts to encourage participants to explore and expand on what they have already said, the interview develops collaboratively.\(^{153}\)

While the participation of the OAC students in the development of the research instruments to be presented to the school boards was extremely valuable, it was not representative of the entire group to be researched. Furthermore, student cohorts are

\(^{151}\) Phelan, Yu and Davidson (1994 p.426) provide an (inadvertent) example of how this can occur and go unnoticed even by experienced interviewers.

\(^{152}\) In contrast, the transition out of school was a future event for Grade 12/OAC students with other related events preceding this. Their interviews began by asking about the courses they had chosen for the year, whereas course choices were a future event for the Grade 9s.

\(^{153}\) As Eichler (1987) states, any method can be misused and recursive interviewing is no exception. The presenting questions are often deceptively simple and the interview style encourages the participant into statements that sometimes surprise them. This is a good reason why autonomous outside interviewers should be used in any organizations where either the subordinated or elevated status of the participants may place them at risk. The utmost confidentiality and security of data and participants' identities need to be preserved.
constantly in motion and these collaborators were about to exit high school and were thus not available to continue their collaborative role. To gain formal access to student collaborators who were part of the research group I had first to meet the school board regulations and have a proposal approved by a joint-board research review committee that only met three times a year. Application rules required the submission of a final version of the research instruments. I initially explained the collaborative research approach, proposing that my submitted instruments were drafts to be adjusted based on feedback from a set of student collaborators drawn from the participating schools in the 1997/98 school year (prior to the actual project year). The review committee rejected this proposal. They were interested in the focus of the project, but did not seem particularly impressed with the needs of the collaborative approach. They were prepared to allow the in-depth interviews, but focused primarily on the questionnaire content. They wanted a finalized questionnaire (in which I was not allowed to ask about things like ethnicity), and they suggested I use my personal network of contacts to identify some students who would volunteer as collaborators over the summer months. I could re-submit the proposal in September 1998. Not only was this a collaborative set-back, it also meant my time and resources were under considerable pressure.

That I was actually able to gain the formal, consent-signed, collaboration of nine students during their summer break attests to the enthusiasm of students to speak about their experiences of entering and exiting high school.\(^{154}\) It would have been possible, if I had had sufficient time, to involve more students. The collaborators included students from several schools, who were either entering or exiting the target grades. They reported a range of academic achievement and ethnic and social background. As well as

\(^{154}\) These nine do not include my children or their friends, who informally offered information about their school experiences over an extended period of time, as well as sometimes testing out my research instruments, commenting on such things as research literature I left around, and the
pilot testing the questionnaire, they explored the best way to broach issues in presenting the research and in conducting the interviews, and why there might be different viewpoints among students. Their contribution was invaluable.  

The one drawback was that the collaborators were mainly not in the schools that would ultimately form the research sites, and those that were had just completed high school. My revised proposal (including negotiated forms of background questions that allowed me to gather needed information) was passed, but I still did not have the “insider” team of research collaborators I had hoped for.

**Collecting the Data**

With Board-level approval gained, one final entry barrier remained to be negotiated before data collection could begin. I had to persuade principals of four individual schools to allow me to conduct the research. Further, the review committee had not allowed me classroom time. They proposed that I gain the voluntary participation of students during lunchtime, ‘spares,’ or before or after school. These Board-imposed constraints on my access to a wide range of students, combined with the time pressure of the school year were at this point somewhat daunting, but once I was actually permitted to contact the schools, gaining the support of the principals proved an easy task. Their collaboration actively reduced some of the constraints on my access to students, as all but one principal perceived the questionnaire to be highly related to school curriculum issues and decided it should be administered during class time to big words I used in my comprehensive and proposal writing! Also a retired teacher familiar with one of my research sites was a very helpful informant at this stage of the project development. There is of course, always the question about who does and does not participate. Students who volunteered were undoubtedly among a relatively articulate group frequently willing to speak up. But, this is an inevitable condition of research – even if subjects are legally compelled to respond, some still will not do so, and others will not do so truthfully. There is no solution to this other than to be aware of who may be “missing” from resulting data.

The reason given for refusing classroom time, and previously for disallowing access to collaborators, was that too much school time had already been lost, due to the 1997 teachers’ strike. How class time was used was a ‘hot’ issue at this point.
encourage maximum student participation. These same principals felt participating in the interviews would also be of educational and social development benefit to the students and granted class release time. In the remaining school, I was allowed two brief assembly sessions and a few minutes follow up class time to ‘advertise’ my research. I devoted as much time as possible to recruiting students in this school but participation was much lower than elsewhere.

Based on the experience of other researchers, and feedback from my student collaborators, I had already decided the collaborative ideal of student interviewers was not necessarily ideal at all. I had hoped, however, to have a team of student collaborators who could help with the questionnaire sessions, especially some of the senior students with the younger grades, and such a team may have been particularly helpful in the school where class time was not granted. The team could then have been encouraged to continue involvement in at least some of the data analysis and dissemination process.

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157 School access wasn’t an entirely stress-free process as I was informed that despite the joint school board approval, one of the participating boards still required its own internal review. Fortunately a supportive official advanced my proposal and facilitated my entry into those schools. Even so, reviews for final year exams were beginning by the time I completed my fieldwork.

158 This is not entirely explained by the lack of class time as at the other sites most senior students elected to conduct the interviews on their own time rather than miss important classes. My observation notes for the site suggest that it was the least student-friendly in terms of daily interactions, but then I was also observing and experiencing them as very much more the marginalized interloper, than was the case at the other sites.

159 Training university students just out of high school would have been a possible compromise solution, but the clash between university and high school timetables, along with lack of training resources made it impossible. I would suggest, however, that the issue of inside-outside interviewer options is one which participatory researchers in general need to look at more closely.

160 As noted earlier, there are issues of development to be considered and in a school setting age adds a further constraint, both because of a need to consider the developmental skills of students, and because laws govern what a child may personally consent too. This was a particular problem with Grade 9 students, who require parental consent to participate and were more prone than under-age Grade 12 students to forget to give letters and forms to parents. Whether this was a cognitive ‘stage,’ or a form of rebellion is difficult to assess, but it did not seem to reflect unwillingness to participate. At least two of the male students offered to forge their parents’ signatures on the consent forms – an offer I obviously declined, even though they assured me that they did it all the time! A form of agency and resistance perhaps?
Although this was no longer a possibility, the collaboration of the participating teachers at the three schools where I had class time enabled me to make the questionnaire sessions action-oriented. Prior to completing the questionnaires, the students were told that their participation was voluntary, that some of them would be offered the opportunity to take part in a further in-depth interview, and that other students had been involved in developing the questions. They were also promised feedback about the research. After the questionnaires were completed, I held an open discussion session about my research and the issues raised in the questionnaire. The teachers as well as the students appeared to enjoy this process and I gained two informal collaborators following these sessions.\textsuperscript{161, 162} I was successful in engaging students in exploring their experiences of entering and exiting high school and the resulting data are extremely rich. Many of the students welcomed the opportunity to have the full attention of an adult and the data make it clear that adolescents value the attention and opinions of adults whom they respect. Seldom does the school (or the rest of society) allow them 60-70 minutes to talk about their experiences and views. The interviews were supposed to be completed in one period, and in most cases this was a comfortable time frame. At the school where interviews occurred at lunchtime there was only about 40 minutes available and this was sometimes not enough, but under these circumstances successfully arranging a second session was difficult.

In total, I gained 214 completed, properly consented questionnaires, and 58 in-depth interviews. Every effort was made to include a representative cross-section of students, much facilitated by the three collaborating schools providing access to

\textsuperscript{161} The question of who participates again needs to be raised. Teachers did not have to let me into their classrooms and I clearly enjoyed the cooperation of teachers who were most student-oriented in the first place.

\textsuperscript{162} One student had initially elected not to fill out the questionnaire as he refused to buy into that sort of thing. But after the discussion, he wanted to talk to me informally about his experiences of
mandatory classes that all students had to take. Successful efforts were made to include students in special circumstances such as teen mothers and special needs students. Even so, it was more difficult for some students to take part for a variety of reasons (such as English as a second language or developmental challenges). As well as providing important background data, the questionnaires provided spaces for open-ended comment throughout. A request at the end of the questionnaire for general feedback was utilized by 92 students and provided some excellent qualitative data. In addition, pre-completion of questionnaires allowed the random drawing of a sub-group by site, gender and grade for an interview. While interviewing all willing students would have been the ideal, neither time, nor finances were available to support this. If I had relied on school staff to identify willing students, the “pet” factor, noted by Goffman, would have been an inevitable problem. After I had made the random selection and gained the consent of the required number of students, I checked the remaining questionnaires for any written requests to be interviewed. I did this because given the epistemological orientation of inclusion it just did not seem right to refuse explicit offers to participate.

In the case of the interview, senior students often had time constraints, which included paid work schedules, as well as class and study needs. It was my observation that young Muslim women who wore the hajib were reluctant to participate at all. I was never able to ascertain why as none agreed to an interview, but it did not apply to the males, and it was related to religion rather than ethnicity.

To ensure a representative cross-section of students were included in the interviews participant selection was stratified by school, grade, and gender. Interviews had to be conducted soon after questionnaire completion and prior to quantitative data entry so a ‘low-tech’ approach to random selection was employed. Available collaborators (between two to four students over three sessions) assisted with this process. I divided completed questionnaires by stratified group then placed one group at a time face down on the floor. The collaborators took turns to select a questionnaire and I recorded the numbers in the order of selection. Subsequently, I pulled the associated contact forms and telephoned participants in order of selection. My goal was 16 interviews per research site (four in each category). Because of the low participation in Site Two, and only two Grade 9 males in Site 4 I completed the gender and grade stratification quotas by drawing additional interviews from sites One and Two. One interview was added because of a written request to take part, another interview was selected to ensure inclusion of a student living
In summary, for a variety of reasons, the collaborative ideal was not attainable. In terms of the use of insider researchers indications are this would not actually be the most desirable approach. Feedback sessions and the study results indicate that many students did feel like participants rather than subjects in the process. Structural and resource restraints, nevertheless, placed significant restrictions on student collaboration in the data collection phase.

**Analyzing The Data**

Data analysis was one phase of the research where student involvement could have been maximized. There is, however, a fine line between allowing students to participate and exploiting their labour. I do not personally think using them to enter data and transcribe interviews without compensating them would be ethical and there were no resources to pay them. I would have liked, ideally, to arrange some co-op placements for students to work on the data analysis phase, but lack of support resources in the university became a major issue for me at this point. With the time to devote, I might have been able to secure university research space and support to engage students in a co-op placement. I did not have that time.\(^\text{165}\)

Lack of time and resources have been a serious impediment to completing this phase of the project and to facilitating the continued participation of students. The amount and richness of the data collected might possibly be viewed as a collaborative success, but was primarily experienced by the researcher as overwhelming in terms of the data analysis tasks. Questionnaire data entry and analysis demands a significant chunk of time and full transcription of 58 hour-long interviews plus observation notes independently and two more were added so that the Community Living program students with developmental challenges could have a chance to fully participate.\(^\text{165}\) The funded portion of my doctoral program had expired forcing me to take paid work elsewhere to support myself. My doctoral committee members were all on leave at this point, and competition was high for any available university resources. The university could not even provide transcribing equipment.
proved impossible.\textsuperscript{166} Available funding to support field research covered just a fraction of the costs involved, and the schools, whilst extremely interested in receiving the research results had no budget to support their development.\textsuperscript{167} I have managed to retain contact with a few student collaborators who have been willing to consult with me on possible interpretations of both quantitative and qualitative data and participate in some dissemination events (discussed below). I was also able to employ one collaborator to conduct reliability checks on the questionnaire SPSS data entry and she proved adept at the task to the point of recognizing and commenting upon the relationship between the numbers and the actual questions.\textsuperscript{168} Nevertheless, delays in the data analysis process have impacted the dissemination of the resulting knowledge, and so inevitably, any action for change.

**Disseminating the Knowledge**

Students who participated in the research were promised, and received, feedback in the following school year, but because the analysis has taken longer than originally anticipated they did not receive a final summary. Instead they were provided with a contact address and invitation to keep me updated on their whereabouts so that I can ensure the final summary reaches them. Returning to their classrooms to share and discuss results has not proved possible for several reasons addressed below in the discussion of action for change. Despite the problems in completing the data analysis

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\textsuperscript{166} Open-ended portions of the questionnaires were all transcribed. Twelve interviews (balanced for site and gender, and randomly selected by the same process as previously described) were transcribed verbatim. These were used to identify key themes and develop a coding scheme. The remainder were reviewed by using a combination of the audio tapes and interview notes. Some passages were transcribed if specifically cited in the results. Observations and follow-up notes were used in hand-written or e-mail form.

\textsuperscript{167} In fact, at the time of the research, due to provincial funding cuts, the schools could not always afford to pay for a substitute teacher in the event of staff illness and students would have to spend the period in the cafeteria. Photocopy budgets for in-school materials ran out, and students frequently had to share text books.

\textsuperscript{168} Twenty percent of the questionnaires were selected randomly and checked in their entirety for any data coding or entry errors. Any identified errors were reconciled and corrected. The rest of the data were also checked for any identified errors that might be recurring.
there have been opportunities to involve students in the dissemination of some preliminary findings. One particular area involves the students’ views and experiences concerning course and career choices. Students and staff in Ontario schools became very aware of this as an issue because the new high school curriculum forces Grade 9 students to make important early course choices that amount to academic streaming. The change to a four-year program also forces earlier post-secondary decisions. In this climate, I was invited to make a presentation at an in-school career fair for students in Grades 9 and 10 and was able to involve student volunteers from the audience in presenting relevant quotes from the research data.\textsuperscript{169} Once again, bureaucratic requirements concerning student freedom of movement and time restraints to meet these, prevented the possibility of having actual research participants fill the collaborator role.

Students have also participated in two further dissemination opportunities: a national career development conference and qualitative methodology conference both held in Ottawa. On the first occasion plans to include the original student collaborators was derailed when the presentation date coincided with end of semester exam schedules. Eventually, thanks to the assistance of the observation site school, I did mange to take six students with me – five students hand-picked by school personnel and one original collaborator now in university.\textsuperscript{170} On the second occasion, three of the original collaborators accompanied me and shared the task of data presentation. Three other interested students were unable to attend because of work or school time restraints.

\textsuperscript{169} See Chapter Four for more about this event.
\textsuperscript{170} The selection criteria were no exam on presentation day and sufficient academic aptitude to be able to spare the time to attend the presentation. One of the new collaborators has kept in touch providing additional feedback. The workshop was reproduced in the conference proceedings (Stratton, 2001).
Both of these events were groundbreaking in terms of involving adolescent research participants in conference proceedings and were successful in the eyes of participants and audience. Even so, the collaborative ideal for the dissemination of knowledge stage is not fully met and I return to this issue in the Conclusion of this dissertation.

**Action for Change**

The collaborative ideal equates action for change with the dissemination of the new knowledge and anticipates the involvement of the researched community in both. The nature of school is that the “inmate” population constantly changes over time (and this is true in large part of other closed institutions). It is, thus, a structural condition that the knowledge created by one group of inmates is more likely to benefit others in the future, than to have much impact on the actual participants. However, additional continuity challenges arise in the context of the school as local school boards have a long-standing policy of rotating principals every few years. Also, a wave of scheduled and early retirements among school teachers and administrators has created an “administration-in-motion” effect. As of January 2002, none of the original principals remained at the research sites, and only one of the vice-principals. Two of my four student liaison teachers have retired and two have transferred to other schools. I am also now located in a different province. All of these things are impediments to action for change.

I will return to the evaluation of the collaborative methodology and the possibilities of actions for dissemination and change in my dissertation conclusion. In the next two chapters I present and discuss results from the study. First, in Chapter Four I present background information on the participants and examine the practical issues and
information related to my second research question, *what are the world-views high school students have concerning the educational process?* In Chapter Five I turn to the more theoretical issues of structure-agency-resistance relationships as reflected in the students' views.

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171 By May 2004, this vice principal had also moved to another school, but the current principal at that site was previously at another participating school and continues to take an active interest in the study results.
CHAPTER FOUR

Getting an Education: Under Pressure and Muddling Through

In the introduction to this dissertation I suggest that the contributions of this study are applied, theoretical, and methodological. The methodological contributions have been discussed in Chapter Three and will be taken up again in my Conclusions. The substantive contribution of my dissertation to the sociological understanding of adolescence and education entwines with both theoretical and applied implications. Chapters Four and Five address the various components of the second and third research questions posed in Chapter Three: *What are the world views high school students have concerning the educational process?*; and, *what are the relationships between the social context of education and the students’ views?* In Chapter Five I draw primarily on the qualitative interview data to discuss the theoretical aspects of the results in terms of the interrelations of structure, agency and resistance. In this chapter, I focus on the results that have the most immediate applied utility in understanding students’ experiences and decision making as they enter and exit high school. 172

The discussion in this chapter is based on the quantitative data provided by 214 students who completed questionnaires, 173 and is enriched by illustrations drawn from the qualitative interview data and observation notes. The chapter provides demographic details about the research participants along with a presentation and discussion of the following areas of results: transition experiences and perspectives; educational attainments, aspirations, and attitudes; present work and future career aspirations; views on educational policies and practices; and finally, leading into the agency-structure focus

172 While Chapter Four tends to relate primarily to the second research question, and Chapter Five to the third, there is considerable overlap among these complex components. In particular, the quantitative results discussed in Chapter Four help define common themes, differences across groups, and parallels and disjunctures between student views and the official discourse (OD, as defined in Chapter Two).
of Chapter Five, a consideration of how students gain and apply information in the process of educational attainment and decision making. Each discussion area concludes with a commentary on the implications for educational policy and practice.

**Setting the Results Stage**

It is my view that quantified data remain important to a sociological understanding. Without it we lack parameters and context for our qualitative insights; and similarly without qualitative explanations and amplification we lose the everyday action and lived experience that lie behind numeric results. The story of action is multi-faceted and requires all available data to be considered together. So, although this chapter will draw mainly on quantitative results, I begin by setting the stage with a qualitative tableau. In May 2000, I was invited to share results from this study at an Ottawa area high school during a “Mini-Career Fair” for Grade 9 and 10 students (the ‘double cohort’). The school-based organizers were a bit doubtful that students would want to take an active role in my presentation, but I decided to take a risk and ask the students for volunteers for an impromptu tableau. I was greeted by a sea of hands and cries of ‘choose me!’ We took just five minutes to prepare and ten students each delivered a quote relating to education and the future. Nine of these statements came from my study data and the tenth and opening quote uses lyrics from a song that I feel very aptly summarizes and reflects thoughts and feelings about agency conveyed by

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173 See Appendix C for the full questionnaire.
174 This school was not one of the four research sites. One or two students attending the career-fair were informal collaborators, but they did not assist me at this event.
175 Five minutes is not long to ‘rehearse’ an unknown tableau and student volunteers were taking a big risk in front of their peers. From the perspective of a teacher, five minutes of ‘dead time’ in a school auditorium with several hundred students, is also a very risky occurrence. As instigator I risked failure on both fronts, but the student audience were well behaved and interested to see what their peers would be doing.
many study participants. Following, accompanied by some of the stage directions (S stands for student), I present an abbreviated version of this tableau:¹⁷⁶

S1: Sitting on edge of stage; deliver with attitude! Remain there until end of tableau

I fear I’m the only one who thinks this way…
and maybe I don’t have a choice
and maybe that is all I have
and maybe this is a cry for help…
don’t you tell me how I feel
you don’t know just how I feel…
I want to know everything…
I want to do something that matters¹⁷⁷

S2/S4: Standing centre stage, part of a group of friends.

Education has become a big deal in today’s world….If we need an education, then we need money….Without water we can’t survive, but without school we can’t either. If we need education so bad then how come they make it so hard to get? [56F12]¹⁷⁸

I think a lot of us don’t know what we want to do, because we don’t know what is out there. I know personally that’s the reason why I haven’t narrowed down my career choice yet. [52M12]

S6: After group of friends leave, walk to centre stage alone. Speak as if thinking aloud

My dad has been working at the same job for over 20 years. He is now a supervisor. He is good in his job, but that is all he knows. He may lose his job. I’d rather have experience in many different fields than just one. I don’t mind that I don’t know what I’ll be doing. I’ll figure it out eventually. So far I have tutoring experience, clerical experience and retail experience. I figure if I get a little bit of everything under my belt I’ll have a better chance than knowing one thing. I think my way is stable; by being flexible. [59F12]

¹⁷⁶ Most of the tableau quotes were also incorporated into a later presentation and publication given at a career development conference. See Muddling Through: What Do Teens Want From Career Counsellors?, Stratton (2001b).
¹⁷⁷ Trent Reznor (1994) From the Nine Inch Nails song “I do not want this.”
¹⁷⁸ The number in square brackets after a quote is the data identifier. The letter represents the participants sex and the number following the letter represents the Grade. It was not possible to separate OAC students from those just in Grade 12 because some students began taking OAC credits as early as Grade 11, while others came back for a sixth high school year in order to obtain needed Grade 12 and/or OAC credits.
S9/S10: *Walk forward to front of stage together and comment to each other as if previously silent observers of the tableau.*

Maybe people should be more careful with education because these are people’s lives that are being played around with. [192F9]

Schools should have a career day or something to help us make a decision on what we would like to be when we grow up. If we had that I think it would help us to achieve our goal in being that, because if we know what we want to be then we’ll try to be it. [30F9]

*Student-actors 1 thru 8 join 9 and 10 at front stage for the well-deserved applause of their peers and teachers. The audience listens attentively to the researcher’s ‘facts and figures.’ At the end, time runs out before their questions do.*

**Sample Distribution**

As discussed in Chapter Three, 214 students from four schools completed the questionnaire and fifty-four of these students took part in in-depth interviews. Because the overall sample is purposive it does not meet the mathematical criteria for statistical testing and quantitative results in this study are merely intended to provide a descriptive background to the qualitative interview discussions. The results cannot be generalized beyond this group of participants but the quantitative results nevertheless, make an important contribution to the student’s story of action and reveal some interesting differences among the participating group. For this reason, I have recorded significant results from Pearson Chi Square tests throughout my discussion.

Table One shows the distribution of study participants who completed the questionnaire. The figure in parenthesis is the number of each group that also took part in an interview.  

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179 As explained in Chapter Three, ideally there would be 16 interviews at each school, four male and four female from each grade. The very low participation rate at Site Two and insufficient male Grade 9 participants at Site 4 meant adjustments had to be made by drawing on the larger corresponding groups at Sites 2 and 3. In the end, greater representation of Grade 12/0AC
### TABLE ONE: Sample Distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL SITE</th>
<th>GRade 9</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Grade 12/OAC</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site One</td>
<td>18 (4)</td>
<td>23 (6)</td>
<td>24 (7)</td>
<td>16 (6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site Two</td>
<td>2 (1)</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
<td>4 (3)</td>
<td>2 (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site Three</td>
<td>28 (4)</td>
<td>22 (4)</td>
<td>28 (3)</td>
<td>18 (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site Four</td>
<td>7 (4)</td>
<td>2 (2)</td>
<td>10 (5)</td>
<td>9 (4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL (N =214)</td>
<td>55 (13)</td>
<td>48 (13)</td>
<td>66 (18)</td>
<td>45 (14)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both public and catholic English schools were included and the four sites were distributed across the school board district of Ottawa-Carleton. Twenty-two percent of the participating students were born outside of Canada and a total of 21 different first languages were reported. English was the first language for 70% of the participants and no other language group formed more than 4% of the sample (Somali and French being the most frequent). Less than 3% were currently enrolled in an English as a Second Language (ESL) program.\(^{180}\)

Twelve percent of the students were enrolled in a French Immersion program; just over 3% indicated being in a gifted program, and 4% were in the Community Living Program (CLP) designed for students with developmental challenges that prevented completion of the regular school curriculum.

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\(^{180}\) Students currently in ESL programs had not acquired the comprehension level required to understand the complexities of the questionnaire and interview questions. One current ESL
Transition Experiences and Perspectives

Experiences of Moving Into High School

As discussed in Chapters One and Two, the period surrounding the transition into high school has been identified as potentially crucial to successful high school completion. Although international research is somewhat difficult to compare because age at high school entry varies considerably, there does seem to be agreement that students who drop out generally become disconnected from school before they reach 16 years of age. Because of age and organizational difference it is impossible to really untangle factors of actual transition to high school from those of personal development. Even within the one school district in this study, students had different organizational experiences of the transition. One of the schools had a junior high program within the same building, so the transition for these students was relatively minor. Another high school received most of its students from a junior high school just yards away. The other two schools received students from wide catchment areas that included high mobility populations.

Despite these organizational variations, most Grade 9 students were fairly positive about their transition experience and conditions at the high school. They had only been in high school a few months and, based on interview data, I think that it is likely the students’ fears about the transition, prior to actually encountering it, were so intense, that only the worst of experiences could have matched them. Thus, the reality...
had been experienced as much better than expected. Grade 9 students also emphasized that they found the high school atmosphere more mature, something which they preferred, even if the work was harder. In contrast, the senior students were more critical about these aspects of high school experience. As some of the younger students explained:

I thought it would be a lot of like, the OACs making fun of you, ‘cause usually you switch schools –ah, my friends that live in Ottawa they had to switch schools and they have like frosh week and they get all these tortures on them. But I thought it was going to be like that, but then when I got – when I became a Grade 9 it was easy…and all the people are nice, so they didn’t do anything like that. [111M9]

Well, it’s semestered and Junior High wasn’t. Classes are longer. And we get to go off limits during lunch and at Junior High it’s not permitted. So it is a little easier. More grown up. Teachers are more informative, more experienced. There are people I see when I walk down the halls, they are a little bigger. I am kind of like a little guy. And it is just a change…it's a higher level of life. [13M9]

Although the social transition was experienced quite positively for most, those changing schools did tend to note concerns about making new friends. Students taking part in interviews felt they were accomplishing this, but failure to do so successfully within the early months of high school would likely alter their view of the transition experience.

Grade 9 students did express some negative views concerning the academic environment. Twenty six percent rated the availability of academic help as poor compared to 12% in Grade12/OAC (p <.05). It is possible that this relates to an adjustment to the more ‘grown up’ culture of high school with its expectation that students would actively seek help when needed. Student comments suggest they simultaneously welcomed being treated as more mature, but missed the higher personal involvement of elementary teachers:

Now that I am in high school, now it’s all up to me, my decisions, you know? [In elementary school] the teachers back then were very good. Like they inspired you a lot. And if you failed, like an assignment, it’s OK. They check your responses, all your errors, but in high school they don’t do that….It’s just more
like you have to ask for [help]. Mostly here in high school it depends on what
teacher you have… I guess that in elementary school your teacher is more like a
parent because that is the only teacher you have and you get to know them.

[186M9]

The importance of teaching practices to the students is discussed more fully in the
section of this chapter dealing with students’ views on policy and practice.

**The "Transition Years" Program**

As discussed in Chapter Two, the study participants in Grade 12/OAC were the
first two cohorts to experience the "Transition Years" (TY) program developed explicitly
to ease the transition between elementary and high school. Officially, the students in
Grade 9 were the last to move into high school under this policy initiative. Study results
indicate that, in practice, the program had been abandoned some time previously, and if
it were ever fully operational, it did not make a lasting impression on many of the
students that were in it. Of the Grade 12/OAC students, 68% said that they had heard of
the program, but of that group, 33% either did not know they had been it or thought they
had not. Only 21% of Grade 9 participants had even heard of the program, with just eight
of these students thinking that they had been in it.

Students who knew they had participated in the TY program had mixed views
about it, some positive, some negative, and others just a little cynical. Overall, 51% of
these students found the program useful. Although knowledge about the TY program
varied little by school site, awareness of participation and opinions about it did. At the
two sites reporting the lowest TY participation, 100% of those students considered it of
little or no use.\(^{184}\) Students at Site Three were divided almost equally in their views, but
at Site One, 78% of students found the program useful. Site One had a higher
population of low income students than Site Three, and the school administration was

\(^{184}\) The schools reporting low TY participation were also the schools with the lowest participation
in this study, which makes it difficult to assess the reliability of the figures, especially for Site Two.
Nevertheless, overall, the qualitative data support my impressions about the school sites.
very active in promoting programs that helped to address social disparity. My observational conclusion is that the attitudes of school staff, combined with the personal needs of the students, were the determining factors. The following quotes, drawn from answers to an open-ended item on the questionnaire illustrate why students held differing views about the TY experience:

Transition Years was a waste of time. Nobody learned anything except that we didn’t have to do anything, as nothing was expected of us. We didn’t put any effort so neither did the teachers and so absolutely nothing was learned or explored or helped in the slightest. [105 F 12]

It was easier because instead of being thrown into H.S. with no clue what to expect, they made grade 7-8 more like H.S. and grade 9 more like elementary. It made it a lot easier for me (although the timetables are hell to figure out!). [59F12]

It was still very overwhelming (still is) and is a constant stress over all school subjects, but at least an ambitious effort was clearly made. [122F9]

I did not understand what was going on. [71M12]

I wasn’t in the program [but] my sister was in this program and found it much easier than what I did from Grade 7-9. [97F12]

I think it is useful but it doesn’t allow the teenager to make up their own minds. [107M9]

I enjoyed the transition years, however, I found that some of the schooling (or curriculum) was too easy. I was shocked when I got into Grade 10 and had little or no math skills. [95F12]

It made the jump from public school to being ignored in high school a bit easier. It helped me to not depend on teachers and peers so much. In high school and up teachers start not caring because they have so many students and they don’t have time for you. So you have to learn how to teach yourself. ☺ [217F12]

My informal discussions with teachers revealed that few had ever been enthusiastic about the program. Some disliked having to teach mixed ability classes; others complained that the resources were never in place to support the program successfully. They confirmed that the program was never fully instituted and was now quite widely ignored in practice. While principals insisted there was still no ability
grouping in Grade 9, some teachers and student collaborators suggested otherwise. Most of the student collaborators knew they had been in the TY program, including the OAC class collaborator group. Based on their comments, and the discussions within the interview data, I conclude that the program was of more social than academic benefit, especially concerning the actual entry into high school. However, that social dimension may have also carried positive academic elements for less socially advantaged students, possibly, as I will discuss in Chapter Five, by providing them with stronger in-school social networks from which to draw educational capital.

The policy initiative also served to increase teacher (and probably parent) awareness about the degree of stress some students experience during the move into high school. As a result of the program, most schools strongly enforced a no initiation policy and introduced organized welcoming events, which seem to be enjoyed by the students. This kind of practice has been continued, even if the organized curriculum aspects of the program have not. Results from this study suggest that even though teachers felt the TY initiative was under resourced and it was unevenly delivered, at least half of high school students aware of their participation recognize benefits from the program. I think that it is most unfortunate that this initiative has been abandoned without ever being formally evaluated.

**Exiting High School: Facing the Future**

When making plans for the future, students reported their greatest concerns as being able to find a job that they liked, affording university or college, and having the right high school credits to do what they wanted. As Table Two shows, handling future workloads and making a mistake in their post secondary choice were close behind. For the most part, student concerns did not vary by grade or gender. Exceptions were that Grade 12/OAC students were more concerned about managing the post-secondary workload and finding a job that they liked ($p < .05$). As well, regardless of grade and in
keeping with their tendency to rate themselves lower on skills acquisition, female
participants were more concerned than males about having the right high school credits
($p < .01$) and managing workloads ($p < .05$).

**TABLE TWO: Students' Concerns About The Future**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF CONCERN</th>
<th>Definite Concern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being able to find a job I like</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being able to afford university/college</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having the right high school credits to do what I want</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being able to handle the work load</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making a job or university/college choice I find I don't like</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing the responsibility of being on my own</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a marriage and family</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making new friends</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of future jobs and post secondary education, participants in the main
research were not asked what they expected to be doing in five years time, but this was
a question posed to the OAC social science students who collaborated on the
development of the research. Most of these students expected to either still be
completed post secondary education or have only just completed. Reasons for this were
varied and included taking a year off; having to work too much to manage a full course
load, and taking a graduate degree or second training program of some kind. The OAC
collaborators also feared that it would be difficult to find suitable employment even with
post secondary qualifications, and this was a concern echoed frequently by interview
participants. For a variety of reasons, among which post secondary costs were a major
issue, students anticipated an extended, and probably less than easy, transition period
from school to future career. My follow-up contact with some of the collaborators
suggests that very few actually experience smooth transitions from school through post secondary education to work destinations.\textsuperscript{186}

The qualitative interview discussions reveal several factors about students' post secondary plans and the concerns they have. First, it can be seen from the extracts below that the students' concerns influence their plans, which in turn include strategies for dealing with these potential problems and anxieties. It can also be seen that the students weigh their social circumstances and personality.\textsuperscript{187}

My plans are I want to go to university to do nursing science. That’s something I’ve always been interested in ever since I was a little child. And the courses I’m taking right now are because they are prerequisites….I’ve applied to Ottawa University, McMaster and Queens. I’ve also applied to Algonquin college, Seneca college…. I thought I’d keep the door open in case something happened with my OACs and I didn’t get enough marks to get into university, then I’d go the college route. It takes a little bit longer, but it still comes out with the same result in the end…. [I have concerns about] the right choices for universities…’cause obviously I’m gonna try and get into the better school. Normally those are more recognized when you’re going out. And for making new friends and stuff, that’s always a kind of concern because you’re not always going with your friends you have from high school….Financing – big time. That’s why I applied to Ottawa – it is a good school – but I applied to Ottawa because it’s close to home and it would be less money and stuff….I plan to do it probably by loans…..[My parents will] contribute a little bit. What we’ve also talked about is if I get loans and stuff, they’ll be making payments on the loans while I’m in school and then in the summer I can make payments. So that when I’m done I won’t have this big load of debt. [147F12]

I chose computers basically because I’m trying to take computer programming in college, and in the case of the future if I get a job I’ll be set. Same thing for math

\textsuperscript{185} The question was only appropriate to students who were about to exit high school and so was not included in the main study.
\textsuperscript{186} Seven of the collaborators I have kept in touch with made seemingly smooth transitions from high school to a chosen university. Of these, only one is content with her original choice and has progressed without detour and hitch. Another is entering her second year, but is dissatisfied with her chosen university. Two left their programs to marry and move to the U.S.A. One had to take a break due to financial stress. Another has changed disciplines twice, completing a college diploma in between. Yet another collaborator, unsure of what post secondary course she wanted to take, chose to travel to the U.K. to work for a year. From these collaborators and some parent contacts, I hear more accounts of “fractured transitions” among students with university entry qualifications, and even completed degrees, but can identify very few who follow a smooth path into a chosen career.
\textsuperscript{187} The transcript excerpts cited here are all from Grade 12/OAC students. However, although less well defined (and often based on little solid information), Grade 9 students had already developed rudimentary plans that involved the same issues and concerns and followed the same kinds of reasoning patterns.
[pause]. And co-op, I guess I just took it so I get myself basically a step ahead…. when I think of my future I’ve always thought of being a pilot, or of computer science [pause]. But I don’t have actual set goals, I just want to get through high school…. Well basically, the whole reason I came to this country was to get an education, ‘cause where I’m from, there are schools, but it wasn’t much. It wasn’t much help because of the war and stuff that was going on at the time. And then basically when we came down here we went right away to school – with no English. I told my Mum and Dad I’d get my diploma [inaudible] and think about doing something. So if I get my diploma – go through high school and college, then I’m thinking about going back home. [72M12]

Um, well university, I don’t exactly know. I put biochemistry down every time someone asks me that, but I don’t exactly know what that entails – what I’m going to like when I get there. But, it’s reassuring that a lot of universities, people I’ve talked to, say you don’t have to decide right away – not for a year or two. Try some courses and then see what….Biology and chemistry were my two favourite courses in high school….I picked, um I think my [Ontario] university choices were Toronto, Ottawa and Queens – like you pay for three selections - and I’m applying to Mount Allison, in New Brunswick. And yeah, the first question [my dad] asked was, “why did you pick Ottawa?” ‘Cause he’s these big preconceptions that the university education is different like wherever you go. I said, “like if money became an issue, then I’d stay at home and then you’d only have to pay for tuition – you’d only need about $4,000, as opposed to like $9,000, which my friend is paying”. Then he’s like, “you know what? You worry about the marks and I’ll worry about the money.” …He’s really academically oriented…. five people got scholarships to um, I think it was Stanford in the US – and he was the fifth person, he just barely made that, like it defined his life….I have a much more laid back attitude to school… because everyone gets grade school, everyone comes to high school. It’s no big deal – you don’t have to do well, it’s always there for you. And now, when it comes to university, not everyone gets that…My friends are all in university now, they’re much more relaxed now they’re in, they’re taking it easy and saying at times it’s hard, but they’re enjoying it. Whereas I’m more stressed than any of them because I’m not there yet. It’s the worst thing in the world to imagine getting those applications back and not having been accepted…You look at people who have university and those who don’t; and all the time my teachers are saying that, like if you only get high school, the best you’re gonna do is minimum wage. Which is like a generalization I guess…but that’s generally the impression that’s been imprinted on me….Again, I hear other stories, like… they’re on academic probation, they couldn’t keep up at university. I don’t know that it’s as bad as not being accepted…but I don’t really know what to expect when I get there….the impression I get is that people spend almost all their time doing homework and just take a break once in a while just to keep themselves sane. [104M12]

Although the backgrounds and current social circumstances of these three students clearly differ, they consider the same basic concerns. Most notable is the role and
influence of parents on plan development, a matter that I return to later in my discussion on information gathering and decision making.  

Educational Attainments, Aspirations, and Attitudes

Educational Expectations

Table Three presents a number of facts related to the students’ educational expectations. It can be seen from this table that the students had very high aspirations for post secondary education and they also reported currently attaining above average grades.

TABLE THREE: Students’ Educational Expectations and Parental Attainments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL OF EDUCATION</th>
<th>Students’ expected education attainment %</th>
<th>Education perceived essential to aspirations %</th>
<th>Mother’s education attainment %</th>
<th>Father’s education attainment %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school diploma</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>34(^{189})</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community college/training program diploma</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Bachelors degree</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate or professional degree</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know/no answer</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27(^{190})</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fifty-three percent of Grade 9 students and 47% of those in Grade 12/OAC claimed an average of 80% on their last report card. Only six percent of the students

\(^{188}\) The matter of influence on decision making is also discussed further when considering student agency in Chapter Five.

\(^{189}\) Sixteen percent of mothers and 14% of fathers had some, incomplete post-secondary education.
reported an average below 60%, with just two Grade 9 students, admitting to a failing average. While these averages seem high, previous research (Looker & Dwyer, 1996) has found self-report to be quite accurate. AS OAC students typically have averages above the school median, and the Grade 9 student reports were based on their last elementary school report, some inflation of the school medians would be expected. There is little reliable information to draw on, but available reports on the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) web site tend to suggest that the students’ reporting is reasonably accurate.\textsuperscript{191}

Given the emphasis official discourse (OD)\textsuperscript{192} places on post secondary attainment, it is not surprising that most students would anticipate continuing their education beyond high school.\textsuperscript{193} Furthermore, Table Three suggests that students perceive university education, and often a graduate degree, necessary to the attainment of their career goals. In keeping with this, many expect to achieve higher levels of education than their parents. While students’ aspirations are high (81% expect to attain a university or college degree), they perceive their parents’ expectations to be even higher.

\textsuperscript{190} In this column, this number includes those who did not have any specific career aspiration in mind. Numbers may not equal 100% due to rounding error.

\textsuperscript{191} The OCDSB reports a board average of 70%, with an 87% pass rate for OAC English. 76% passed general grade 12 English with a Board average of 60% (and this is the lowest level mandatory course for high school graduation). Site Two claims results 2-3% higher than the Board average for OACs in English and Calculus. Site One claims one third of OAC students achieved Ontario Graduate Scholarships, which requires an average of 80% or more (see www.ocdsb.edu.on.ca Board and school profiles). Anecdotally, I know that Ottawa schools routinely claim to achieve above the Ontario average. Cross tabulation does show that students in Grade 12/OAC were more likely to report averages below 70% than were the students in Grade 9. It is also possible that lower achieving students were less likely to complete the questionnaire.

\textsuperscript{192} In Chapter One, I discuss dominant discourses in the context of Foucault. In Chapter Two I have used texts of educational policy and reform as example instruments that convey this discourse. The letters OD are used to convey this concept.

\textsuperscript{193} In summer 2001, the OCDSB conducted a Graduate Survey of students graduating in 2000 (which would include some of my sample). The Board admits a low response rate, but reports that 84% - 95% of students planned to go to university or college and 80% actually did so! This is far above national averages. The Board also reports that 47% of respondents received scholarships ("Board Profile, Measures of Student Achievement and Success," www.ocdsb.edu.on.ca).
Students reported that 74% of their parents expected them to go to university and an additional 14% expected at least a community college education.

Figures from Statistics Canada (2001) support the students’ perceptions about their parents.\textsuperscript{194} Nationally, 87% of parents hope their children will gain post-secondary education. Expectations do vary by household income and parental level of education, but 80% of parents with income under $30,000 still want their children to have post-secondary education. Parents with less than high school education had the lowest expectations for their offspring (70%), while the completion of community college or university raised expectations to above 90%.\textsuperscript{195}

In the present study, 82% of students anticipated that parents would provide at least some financial support for their post secondary education, with 43% expecting parental support to be their primary source of funding. Most students anticipate a combination of funding sources with 73% planning to work part-time during post-secondary studies, 51% anticipating contributions from both loans and their own savings during high school, 36% hoping for scholarships or bursaries, and 10% predicting working full-time while studying.

Figures from Statistics Canada (2001) show that parents also foresee a similar mosaic of post-secondary funding. However, the report notes that parents’ mean savings for each child aged 14 to 18 was only $5,000 – little more than the cost of first-year university tuition. Furthermore, 70% of parents expect their children to contribute funds from work prior to post secondary enrolment and 86% envisage their children working part-time while in post-secondary studies. The report notes that lower income households were less likely to have any savings, or to have fewer savings than more

\textsuperscript{194} These data are from the *Survey of Approaches to Educational Planning*, the first Canadian household survey to collect such information. It was conducted as a supplement of the Labour Force Survey in 1999 and collected data on 20,353 children aged 18 years and under.
wealthy parents. In keeping with this, there was a higher expectation of contributions from student work and loans. This likely underestimates the impact of economic status on the ability to fund post secondary education as wealthier parents would be better able to offer on-going financial support without additional savings.

Results from this study, in conjunction with Statistics Canada figures, suggest that although both parents and students seem to share an understanding that post-secondary education will require a financial plan that likely demands a combination of contributions and resources, neither group appears to have clear and realistic plans about the necessary amount of the contributions required to support their mutually high expectations.

Interestingly, the students in the present study perceived both their friends and teachers to have lower expectations of them regarding post-secondary education.

Forty-two percent of participants thought that their friends expected them to go to university, while an additional 13% believed their friends expected them to achieve at least a community college education. An additional 10% of students specifically indicated that their friends saw a variety of future possibilities. These included completing post-secondary education, going straight to full-time work, travelling, and just hanging around (essentially meaning unemployed).¹⁹⁶

Interview data help to explain why friends may hold more variable expectations of each other. Students knew what their parents wanted and teachers “talk about how important [education] is to have a good job,” but “friends talk about [their future] all the time” [113M9] . Friends (and siblings and their friends) collectively represent a range of

¹⁹⁵ Ninety-seven percent for those with graduate degrees. Wherever noted by Statistics Canada, averages for Ontario were above the national average (The Territories are not included).
¹⁹⁶ An "other" category was provided for this item and it elicited a number of interesting, emotionally based minority responses in each category: such as “they just want me to be happy”; “I don’t care”; “they don’t care.” The latter was confined to teachers.
different social groups, goals and possible outcomes. As they explained, among friends, students can ‘try on’ different future roles:

I think I am influenced a lot by my friends – probably more than my parents because I know what they want me to do...[but] if I see a friend of mine going to college instead of university – someone who’s been raised the way I have – then I might, you know, say well if they can do that, then I can too. [279F12]

My sister….went to Queens….Well it sounds like a lot of work…but she still manages to have fun….I’m hoping to go visit her next year….a friend of mine who’s graduating this year did that – stayed with my sister, went to her classes for a day to see what it was like. [4255F12]

Overall, students perceived the post secondary expectations of their teachers to be similar to those of their friends with 40% thinking that teachers expected them to go to university and a further 15% reporting teacher expectations for at least community college. Not knowing parents and friends’ expectations was minimal (less than 4%), but 37% of students indicated not knowing what their teachers expected of them regarding post-secondary destination. As might reasonably be expected, more students in Grade 9 (46%) are unsure of teacher expectations. Furthermore, Grade 9 students were less likely than those in Grade 12/OAC to believe that their friends expected them to achieve post secondary education (p<.001, Pearson Chi Square).197

Taken together, these results suggest that while students accurately perceive, and strive to meet, their parents’ high expectations for their educational success, they simultaneously perceive that other groups may see less optimistic prospects for their post secondary careers. Such a pattern of answers that discriminates among the views and perceptions of different social groups, strongly suggests the students have a dynamic, reflective, and multi-faceted view of themselves in relation to the social world.

197 Even so, given my discussions later in this chapter and in Chapter Five regarding the role denial plays in resisting negative implications of the OD about education, I think it is possible that students may report not knowing, when they prefer not to acknowledge low expectations. This may be particularly true when teachers indicate lower expectations than the high hopes expressed by parents.
In the discussions of agency in Chapter Five it can be seen that many students believe individual effort and determination can overcome structural obstacles. Thus, while they recognize barriers exist, they remain actively hopeful of finding ways to achieve their aspirations. On the negative side, where strong parental encouragement and support are absent, perceptions about the expectations of teachers and friends may be a crucial factor in educational persistence. It is well established that most students who drop out do so by Grade 11; thus, the tendency for students entering high school to believe peers and teachers have low expectations of them is a potential concern worthy of further attention.\footnote{198}

**Educational Attitudes**

Students were asked several questions pertaining to their attitudes towards school and their responses show that most students maintain fairly positive views. Asked to rate their agreement with a variety of statements about school participation, 26% totally agreed that they enjoyed school and 55% somewhat agreed that they did. In contrast, only 4% indicated total disagreement with that statement. Similarly, just 4% of students felt their classes were a total waste of time, while 46% disagreed with that statement and a further 35% somewhat disagreed.

The majority of participants either agreed (25%), or somewhat agreed (43%) that their friends did the best they could to get good grades, while less than 8% totally disagreed with this. When it came to their own efforts in school, only 5% of students totally agreed that they did as little school work as they could get away with, while 52% totally disagreed that was so, and a further 27% somewhat disagreed. Male students were more likely to express some disagreement with the statement (p<.05).

\footnote{198 While early discouragement clearly is not desirable, hopelessly unrealistic expectations are not productive either. I take this matter up again later in the chapter.}
Students also indicated that they mostly did their homework with 48% in total agreement with this, 29% somewhat agreeing, and just six percent in total disagreement. Students also reported the number of hours they spent on homework each week. The median weekly hours spent on homework was 7, with 5 hours being the modal value. Three percent of students claimed no homework hours at all and just over 6% reported spending 20 hours or more per week. As might be expected, students in Grade 9 spent considerably fewer hours on homework than the senior students (averages of 6.35 and 10.42 hours per week respectively; \( p < .000 \)). Somewhat surprisingly, Grade 9 students were more likely to report always doing their homework (\( p < .05 \)). Some explanation for this may derive from a consideration of total workload (discussed more fully in the following section). Although 28% of Grade 12/OAC students reported doing more than 15 hours of homework per week (compared to just two percent of those in Grade 9), almost 50% still reported less than 10 hours a week (compared to 78% in Grade 9). When it is noted that just over 50% of the senior students were also reporting more than 15 hours of paid work per week (compared to only 8% in Grade 9), it suggests the possibility (supported by other studies of students' paid work) that high work hours interfere with homework completion.

Views on the adequacy of education were addressed by asking the students to rate how well they thought their schooling was providing them with a set of skills identified as important by the OD.\(^{199}\) Table Four presents this list of skills along with the students' ratings re their acquisition. It can be seen from this table that by far the majority of the students positively rated their acquisition of skills in traditional literacy areas (reading, writing and arithmetic), and this is consistent with the high average grades they also reported.
TABLE FOUR: Students’ Ratings of Skills Acquired via Formal Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SKILL ACQUIRED VIA EDUCATION</th>
<th>Very well %</th>
<th>Quite well %</th>
<th>Not very well %</th>
<th>Not at all %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to communicate thoughts clearly in an official language (i.e., English or French).</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to write effectively in an official language</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to read a wide range of material easily</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday arithmetic and numeracy (including understanding graphs and charts)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word processing skills (e.g., using a computer to type reports)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to seek and find information on any topic</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic use of E-mail</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic use of the Internet to find information</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to use CD ROMS for information searches</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to question the information obtained</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to solve problems logically and constructively</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A positive attitude towards continued learning</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To contribute positively as a member of a team</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To take on a leadership role when needed</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, the participants were similarly positive about problem solving, team and leadership skills, and continued learning, but less so where the group of "information age" skills are concerned. More than one quarter of the students said that their schooling was not providing these skills well, and where electronic technology was concerned, the number is closer to 50%. This did not necessarily mean students did not have good skills in these areas, but often they had gained them informally. It does suggest that if students do not have access to Internet technology and tutoring outside of school, their formal education will likely not compensate for this lack.

199 These elements were drawn from a list published by the Conference Board of Canada, and skills debates discussed by me in Stratton (1996c). They are also readily identifiable in Bégin and Caplan (1994) and the Ontario reform discourse discussed in Chapter Two.

200 These numbers may actually over-report the positive role school plays in the acquisition of these skills. I discovered during the interviews that some students rated their actual ability in these areas, but had not gained the skills at school.
For most skills, perceptions concerning acquisition did not differ by either sex or grade. A notable exception was the rating of numeracy skills. Female students in both grades were less likely to report high numeracy acquisition and more likely to say their schooling had not provided these skills well (p<.01). Among these study participants gender differences, at least in the perception of math ability, are present and are not changing among younger students. Similar perceptions of gender difference in language acquisition were not present, however. Other areas of gender difference were related to electronic information searching via Internet and CDROM. Once again, female students in both grades were more likely to report low acquisition of these skills via school and less likely to say the school had provided them well (p <.05).

Given the emphasis placed on information age skills, the low rating of school-based learning for computer related proficiency should be noted as a policy/practice concern. Gender differences, however, are not present when the students report their actual use of electronic searches for school and personal information purposes. This suggests an area for further research to assess the generalizability of these trends, untangle perceptions from actual skills, and understand the reasons behind such gender based perceptions. The importance of this issue is underlined in the results pertaining to future aspirations (discussed below) where the lack of female students’ aspirations for computer technology careers is notable.

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201 It should be noted that about 19% of all students reported not having acquired electronic search skills via school at all, and over 30% did not obtain e-mail skills via the school. There is some indication that CDROM use is higher for both sexes in Grade 9 with 11% of males and 15% of females reporting no skill acquisition versus 16% of males and 29% of females in Grade 12/OAC.

202 The one exception to this was the use of CDROMs for personal interest, with female students being less likely to use this search tool. Male and female use of the internet was equally high with less than 9% reporting no use at all. This also suggests, as do the interview data, that some students who reported gaining no electronic search skills in school obtained them elsewhere.

203 It is also previously noted that males report doing less homework. There is, however, no corresponding difference in reported grades, and other research has tended find a trend of higher average female achievement in high school and beyond. Based on some very consistent and widespread anecdotal evidence from university professors and their assistants, students in this
**Students and Work**

**Present Work Involvement**

As noted above, Canadian parents expecting their children to enter post-secondary education also expect them to have income from work while still in high school (Statistics Canada, 2001). In keeping with this, in the present study, 72% of Grade 9 students and 80% of those in Grade 12/OAC reported being engaged in part-time paid work. Among the students with paid work, 81% of those in Grade 9 worked less than 10 hours per week, 13% worked 10 to 15 hours and 4% worked 16 or more hours. Grade 12/OAC students generally worked longer hours (p < .000) with 37% reporting more than 16 hours per week. Only 33% worked less than 10 hours. Just over 22% of participants reported having two jobs.

Student employment was primarily within the sales and service sector. Eighty-eight percent of first jobs, and 72% of second jobs, were within this sector, primarily in child care, cleaning and food services. No other sector offered a particularly notable source of employment but the trades and computer technology sectors were the distant runners up. Four percent of first jobs and 6% of second jobs were in trades, and 1% and 5%, respectively, were in computer technology. As Table Five shows, employment in the sales and services sector varied by age and gender. This pattern of current employment contrasts sharply with the students’ career aspirations (see Figure One and following discussion).

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*study would seem to have a generally inflated perception of their skills acquisition. Problematic is the fact that perceptions are what influence actions and decisions. Furthermore as ‘interest’ is cited as a major influence on decisions but highly related to perceptions of ability and achievement (see discussion later in this chapter), untangling and confronting these relationships and gender differences seems important to encouraging sounder educational choices.*

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204 For coding details see the footnote associated with Figure One (located under the subsequent discussion of career aspirations).
TABLE FIVE: Student Employment – Sales and Service Sector

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JOB KIND+</th>
<th>Total++</th>
<th>By gender***</th>
<th>By grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N =108</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Care</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Services</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

+ Only figures for the first reported student job have been used. Second jobs show a similar pattern but several cell numbers are too small to be considered reliable.
++ Columns may not add to 100% due to rounding.
*** p <.000 all Row items by gender; and as indicated by grade
**p <.01

Within sales and service sector employment, a clear division of labour by age and gender is discernible. Based on my observations and interactions with the student collaborators, age is initially the key component because food service businesses generally do not employ students under 16 years of age. These younger adolescents turn to the informal markets of child care and cleaning where the division of employment is also highly gendered. This may be driven as much by adult inclination toward female child carers as by students’ work preferences. Via my observations and interactions with the student collaborators I noted that many students moved from these occupations into food services just as soon as they were able to obtain a position. The results show however, that senior female students were more likely to retain their child care work while the majority of their male peers completely abandoned cleaning. When asked what jobs they had, 103 (49%) of the students, apparently anxious to convey their work skills, actually provided (along with the actual job title) detailed descriptions of the work they did. I think that the low-end service sector nature of student work may encourage researchers to overlook the important social development role it plays. Subtle hierarchies and networks, constructed around age and gender, exist among student job...
opportunities. Finding a job at a store or food outlet can potentially change a student’s entire social world and related anticipation of future possibilities, as one student explains:

I delivered papers - my sister did it in high school and I just took it over, but gave it to my brother now….I like the atmosphere [at Tim Horton’s] more than working at MacDonalds …that was my last resort….My mom pushed me to call and get a job, so I called and then I had an interview…I didn't know anyone but I made friends. It wasn't that hard….I've changed through high school, and I make more friends than I did before….I feel better now…and I'm open to…a lot of different things - more opportunities [255F12]

As well as school and paid work, 92% of participants reported doing some family work each week. Eighty-eight percent reported less than 10 hours and the majority did less than 5 hours per week, but senior students were more likely to contribute over ten hours (p < .05). Forty percent of students were also doing volunteer work with 92% of these providing under 10 hours per week.

When all types of student work (homework, paid, volunteer, and family work) are combined with the approximately 30 hour compulsory school week, most students in high school have a total work week similar to many adults and are gaining experience in juggling multiple kinds of work and family commitments. It would appear that overall workloads increase as the students progress through high school as by Grade 12/OAC,

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205 There is a lot more that might be explored here.. Once recognized, the hierarchies among student jobs are fascinating: the 'best' part-time service jobs (waiting table versus serving fast-food; selling electronic good versus stocking shelves; and being a bank clerk versus supermarket cashier) go to university rather than high school students. Female high school students seem to have better chances at the more prestigious jobs available (child care over janitorial; cashier over shelf-filler; coffee shop over burger joint etc.).

206 I did not ask about extra-curricular activities such as school sports and arts related activities, because my focus was on elements of ‘getting an education’ promoted by the OD. Given the findings in this study about overall student workload, and about the creation of educational capital (developed in Chapter 5), there would have been value in including them. Based on the interview discussions, and my knowledge of the collaborators’ activities, most students had to make trade-off decisions around paid work, homework, and extra-curricular involvement. Participation in school plays, concerts, tournaments, field trips, and exams could generate tremendous pressure and stress for the students at school, home and work.
51% of students were reporting (in addition to the school hours) 16 or more hours total work per week (compared to only 8% in Grade 9).

Despite the prevalence of student engagement in paid and other work, participants contended (and my observations concur) that many teachers did not recognize students' overall workload. As one student expressed it:

Teachers don’t seem to get how hard it is to balance out a school life, work life and maybe some social time in your week. They make it seem as if our lives are based on school and school only. Sometimes, teachers give you three hours of homework for one subject and not take into consideration that you do also have other subjects/courses you still have to do work in. Especially if you have no choice but to work after school at one job, or in my case two jobs. [69F12]

Based on my communications with the student collaborators, most seem to have sufficient flexibility around paid work hours to allow a reduction in the amount worked during a 'heavy' semester of hard courses, and/or around exam time. Nevertheless, some students – a vulnerable minority - do not have such options and the demands of school, family and paid work can become stressful to the point of endangering physical and mental well-being as well as educational achievement.\textsuperscript{207} For example, two students reported in excess of 50 hours per week family work. One of these students participated in an interview. She had left home at 16 and a major portion of her family work was related to the upkeep of a large, aging dog.\textsuperscript{208} She also did 16 hours paid work per week, which was at a veterinary clinic and afforded additional benefits for the care of her dog. She reported only three homework hours, yet still maintained a 'B' average and hoped to go on to college or university. She spoke of the stress and social isolation of her circumstances:

\textsuperscript{207} As noted above, this study did not ask about school connected extra-curricular commitments, but my observation is that these activities, once undertaken, can be the least flexible and most stress-generating, especially when coaches/teachers lose site of the 'bigger picture.'
\textsuperscript{208} One of the research sites had special provisions for young single mothers completing high school and this would be the most likely explanation for very high family hours. The demands of a small child would be even greater than in the case of the large and aging dog.
I've been on my own for a year and stuff. I don't like coming here....it's hard, I have bills to pay, rent, and my dog. It's hard going to school and working [pause] so, I'm not like most students when its March Break party and all that. I'm old - I feel old....[I dropped out] last year...[but] well, I have to finish high school. I don't want to be like 20 and still here....[I'm concerned about] being able to go to college or university, and just being able to afford it – to go every day- because I need the money...I'm not on welfare or anything right now and I have never been....It's stressful – very, very stressful...but its just such a hassle to get.... Because of all the cuts and stuff and I'm not 18 yet.. And I wouldn't want my Mom to know. She'd be like – it would probably be embarrassing for her....Every day it's stressful. Most people my age have jobs to spend money on themselves, to go out. Everybody will go, “call me tonight,” but I...don't really hang out with a big group of people or buy anything for myself. I don't have time and usually you're paying for something if you go out [laugh].... Before when I was still at home I would always go out. I would always want to be gone and I would...be talking on the phone all the time. But now it's like I never call anybody. I have a few friends and we hang together once in a while. But mostly I don’t want to go out anymore, don’t want to go partying....mostly, just because I’m tired when I get home and I feel most comfortable at my house. I don’t really have money to go out [pause]. It’s just I’ve changed from the people I used to hang out with three or four years ago. They’re still pretty much at the same mental maturity as they were then, and it’s just - I don’t know [pause] I’m different from them.....I’ve lived through a lot. I mean it’s great they’re still young and concerned about who likes who and [pause]...I just keep my problems to myself. [73F12]

**Future Career Aspirations**

A questionnaire item asked students to state two future career goals. Only 54% of students actually provided two aspirations, while 83% listed at least one.

Understandably, Grade 9 students were less likely to have clear aims (p <.05), but regardless of grade, the core reasons given for a lack of specific career ambitions related to the students’ lack of career related knowledge and resulting uncertainty about the right choices to make for the future. The following kinds of explanations were offered:

There are so many fields out there that I find interesting, but I can’t decide on anyone in particular that satisfies me in what I am looking for [47M12].

I don’t know what I want any more because I don’t know what is out there. [162F9]

Not sure what I can do or be prepared for. Not really old enough. Not sure about different courses or careers. [121F9]

I just don’t know what field I would enjoy or how and why I should specialize [143M12]
Figure One shows students’ career aspirations by major job sector. Table Six (following) presents aspiration details by gender and compares these with actual Canadian employment by sector.

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209 The broad job sectors used for analysis in Figure One are based on sectors used in the Canadian Classification Dictionary of Occupations, and by Statistics Canada prior to 2000. Information age work is posing some challenges for job coding. After discussion with my dissertation committee members, it was decided to retain the older categories allowing better comparison with previous work on students’ aspirations including Stratton, 1994 and 2001c. Initial coding was by job category, recoded into sectors. The same coding was used for students’ current jobs, their aspirations, and their parents’ jobs. Science categories have been broken down because of the strong OD focus on math, science and technology (MST) skills and careers, and because of the very marked gendered pattern associated with these sub groups.

210 As noted earlier, I am drawing these figures from Stratton (2001c). Some small shifts may be present if current Census figures were used. However, general distributions and trends remain.
As already mentioned, the students’ aspirations are more varied than their present areas of employment with relatively few aspirations for careers in the sales and service sector, although this is by far the sector in which most Canadians are actually employed. At first glance, it seems that students have absorbed the OD concerning math, science and technology (MST) careers. When all science categories are totalled, 42% of students’ first aspirations, and 40% of second aspirations, are assigned to MST occupations. As I have pointed out in Stratton (2001c), MST occupations, in fact, only account for about 11% of all Canadian employment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EMPLOYMENT SECTOR</th>
<th>1st Aspiration</th>
<th>2nd Aspiration</th>
<th>Canadian Distribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sciences (MST)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life sciences</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical sciences</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer sciences</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts/ Entertainment/Athletics</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales and Services</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trades</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further examination of Figure One and Table Six raises some questions about the ways in which the OD is actually accepted or rejected by the students. There is a clear divergence between students’ aspirations and actual employment distribution in Canada. Furthermore, the types of MST career to which the participants aspire are highly

211 Figures are taken from Stratton 1996c. This analysis did not separate out Canadian employment distribution by science type. Self-employed persons would generally be included in their employment sector. In the present study some students did not specify their field of self-employment.
gendered. Close to one third of the male students aim to work in computer technology - a proportion far greater than actual employment in that area. In contrast, barely 3% of female students want work in this area. Instead, their science interests focus on life sciences, where because it includes a range of health occupations, there is traditionally relatively high female employment. The life sciences are not, however, promoted by the OD.

The next highest category of aspirations is for social science careers with 23% of both first and second aspirations falling in this sector. \(^{212}\) High interest in this career area (along with that of arts and entertainment) definitely cannot be explained by an engagement with the OD. In fact, during the research period, teachers and some areas of social science and humanities came under particular attack as useless or non-employable occupations.

Also interesting to note is that in general, the sector groupings of aspirations are similar for Grade 9 and Grade 12/OAC students. Examination of the job category frequencies and the interview data suggests that students may moderate their goals (e.g., change from wanting to be a veterinarian to aiming for veterinary assistant; from psychologist to social worker, etc.), but they tend to favour the same career areas. There is also an observable trend for Grade 12/OAC students to increase their consideration of sales and service sector jobs and reduce their interest in physical sciences. I return to the implications of this in my following discussion of the viability of students' aspirations.

Overall, students' aspiration patterns suggest variegated and gendered influence by, and response to, OD themes and the interview data support this. As some of their

\(^{212}\) These include: all social science disciplines, plus all teaching, information specialists (such as librarians, researchers), counsellors of all kinds, and criminal justice personnel.
comments illustrate, students engage reflectively and may accept, contest, or negotiate with the OD around desirable career goals:

I feel too much emphasis is placed directly on maths and sciences. The arts are a very important part of life. Without them, personal expression would cease to exist. There would just be a clan of mechanical people – fake. I feel as if courses such as art and history should be more mandatory. Sure math and science will prepare you for a high paying job, but what about social skills? Art, English and history give you lessons on life. Having a good job is important, but so is having a good personality, as well as the ability to express yourself.

I don’t believe our school (schools) are geared nearly enough toward preparing children for jobs and the working and technological world. Not enough focus is on computers and the technologies and communications you will experience when leaving school. Far too much focus of teaching is on facts that can easily be looked up at any given time. More attention should be paid to what can be, and how to apply things in the outside world.

Viability of Student Aspirations

The disjuncture between actual Canadian employment distribution and the students’ aspirations does suggest that many students will not be able to attain their present goals. As I have discussed in Stratton (1996c), the actual facts about Canadian employment patterns are at odds with OD content, but this is not well recognized even by career counsellors. In the later section concerning students' information gathering and decision making processes, I address the complexity of their choices more fully. In this section I focus on the fact that many student aspirations are not viable and ask which students are more or less likely to achieve desired careers.

There are also a number of indicators that absent or incorrect information leads some students to make early choices that decrease or eliminate their chances of realizing their aspirations. In order to evaluate this process I created a variable that took into account the students’ career and educational aspirations, course selection decisions and reported grade average. Based on this, 50% of the students held aspirations that

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213 It should be noted that the quotes go against the quantitative trend with regard to gender. While this does not in any way invalidate that trend, it does underline the importance of not
were currently realistic and a further 29% had still possible (but not very likely) career
goals. Grade12/OAC students were far more likely (62%) than those in Grade 9 (34%) to
hold realistic goals and less likely to harbour completely unrealistic aspirations
(G12/OAC = 10%; G9 = 35%; p <.000). It is hard to say without considerably more
focused research what the reasons for the change are. Is it social and cognitive
development, and/or the act of making serious course decisions that prompts better
information acquisition? In Stratton (1994), I found that Grade 10 students who were
about to make course selections for Grade 11, were very poorly informed, but some did
say that the research and the actual course selection process prompted them to seek
out more information. Alternatively, as I previously implied, the senior students may
merely adopt less ambitious goals after realizing they do not have the educational
requirements to attain their earlier aspirations. Failure to understand job availability,
training requirements, and sector potentials lead adolescents to pursue aspirations they
will eventually have to discard. Under these circumstances, belated adoption of more
realistic goals is not necessarily a positive occurrence. Other research has shown that
students’ interest in science continues to decrease even among university science
majors (Tilleczek,1993) while students who do not obtain post secondary credentials are
particularly prone to end up staying in the low paying service sector jobs many of them
already occupy (Duffy, Glenday & Pupo, 1997; Statistics Canada,1998).

In this study, both quantitative and qualitative results reveal that the knowledge students
do possess about future employment is constructed from a confusion of official and
counter discourse elements. A set of standard questions asking participants about their
general employment attitudes revealed that the majority of students (varying between
approximately 70- 80%) expressed positive and mainstream views in keeping with the

reducing these complex issues to a one factor explanation.
They did not want to be on welfare or to be unemployed and were willing to accept a minimum wage job to avoid that. They accepted the view that Canadians can earn sufficient income to support themselves as long as they try, but that a university education was needed for a good job. If such education was attained, the participants believed they should be entitled to a job in keeping with their training. A similar majority also held the contradictory opinion that too many people in Canada were paid less than they deserved. Most students believed job security was very important, but expressed a willingness to be flexible indicating they would be willing to move, work from their home, and/or take short-term jobs.

The students’ answers tend to mirror the ‘right’ (OD) position on these questions, and their actual aspirations reflect the belief in the necessity of, and rewards for, post-secondary education. Despite this pattern of socially compliant answers, one item stands out in defiance of the OD imperative towards early educational and career tracking: regardless of grade level and previously providing a career aspiration, almost half (46%) did not feel ready to make a long-term commitment to a job. Their contradictory views (noted above) also suggest some cognitive conflict concerning compensation expectations. Students know the OD position but also accommodate the possibility that rewards for educational achievement may be minimal. Furthermore, the lack of aspirations for self-employment and service sector positions does not support a real commitment to flexibility.

Such tensions were sometimes addressed during the interviews, where discussions about future employment were more nuanced and tended to involve

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214 These items have been used quite widely in Canadian research and are considered reliable. However, the participants’ responses to these items contain the highest level of uncritical, OD reflection of the entire study. They do not, therefore seem to fit well with either the qualitative discussions, or the more discriminating patterns found in responses to most of the other survey items. I think this is probably due to the ‘motherhood and apple pie’ nature of the statements (see
reflection on personal experience. Students knew they were expected to have future aspirations and when questioned about them could usually produce answers that would serve to get parents and teachers off their backs for a while. In the non-judgemental atmosphere of the interview, they were more willing to reveal conflicts, doubts and reasoning processes. Most students think that the social world they will face as adults differs considerably to the one their parents encountered at a similar age. As one student put it:

My parents don't have a great education but they've made it in the world because of when they started 17 years ago. Now it is next to impossible to be able to, like my father, quit school at Grade 8 and go on your own. [54F12]

Other students pointed out that education and experience were no longer guarantees of permanent employment; students with immigrant parents had no valid base point for comparison; and parents with marginal employment generally encouraged their children to aim higher. Students claim to be highly influenced by their parents' views, but this apparently does not translate into emulating their parents' career paths. Parental employment was reasonably in keeping with the Canadian distribution with higher than average engagement in social and computer science fields. It must be noted, however, that although missing data were generally very low for the questionnaire items, 43% of students did not report father's employment and 28% did not indicate mother's employment. This situation might be expected to improve among senior students, but that is not the case.

More than one quarter of the students also reported not knowing the level of education their parents attained and such levels of missing data on these items are

questionnaire Item # 17, Appendix C– we all know what we are supposed to answer and the 'wrong' answer is unattractive anyway (who wants to be unemployed or on welfare?).

Another example, relating to the need for flexibility and open options, is cited as part of the qualitative tableau at the beginning of this chapter.
common in student-completed surveys.\textsuperscript{217} Parental education is known to be highly related to children’s attainments, so it would seem important to better understand the reasons behind this low reporting pattern, but previous research has not drawn attention to this high incidence of missing answers. Based on my observations and opportunities to speak with students about this, I can surmise two main possibilities. The first is that there is a state of disengagement between the student and her/his family. This certainly may explain a portion of the problem, especially where a parent is absent from the home (and that would be in keeping with the greater amount of missing information for fathers shown earlier in Table Three). On the other hand, 99\% did answer the question about their parents’ expectations of post-secondary achievement, and 95\% actually knew what that expectation was. This suggests a more complex explanation is needed for the missing data on parental occupation and education.

As I have mentioned, following the completion of the questionnaires students had an opportunity to comment on, and question me about the research. During these sessions, students frequently challenged the inclusion of questions about parents’ education and occupation and I believe that some students deliberately omit this information because they are aware it is used to assign social status. Minority students were particularly savvy to the discourse attached to SES measurements. Far from wishing to celebrate and reproduce cultures perceived by the mainstream as not valuing/achieving formal education (and therefore considered ‘lower class’), students seek to hide their low SES status from those (such as teachers and researchers) whom they fear may use such knowledge to further diminish their chances in the educational stakes. Given the opportunity to contextualize their answers in these discussion

\textsuperscript{216} This is not really surprising given the location of the research in Ottawa, an IT centre (before Nortel crashed) with two universities, and many political and bureaucratic positions. 
\textsuperscript{217} During my work for Stratton (1994) I examined many research papers based on surveys of students and I noticed the persistently high level of missing data for these items.
sessions or the interviews, I found students often knew more than they were prepared to commit to survey boxes! It is possible, however, that this same fear may lead some parents to avoid providing their children with such information, especially at an early age. The trend for students from low SES families to have lower educational attainments is well established and based on this, cultural reproduction theories tend to assume such families do not sufficiently value educational achievement. Qualitative data in this study refute that notion and illustrate that knowing about a parent’s low educational attainment is not necessarily detrimental to encouraging higher educational achievement. On the other hand, I have learned from the collaborators that young adolescents from all backgrounds often do not fully grasp exactly what work their parents do, and parents may be assuming knowledge where there is none. Students need to know about the work their parents do, the skills involved, and the part educational attainment played in that, and neither parents nor children should have to feel shamed or threatened by it. There is no question that this issue challenges core societal values about the worth of certain work in ways that are far beyond the scope of this thesis; nevertheless, individual recognition of the points made here can change the school climate.

Data from the present study attest that high school students generally lack an accurate picture of the job market, or of the requisite qualifications for particular careers, a situation often acknowledged by students during their interviews. This is a state of affairs that indicates the proposed changes to earlier streaming and course selections will be detrimental to the future options of many students. The important role of information assimilation in decision making is addressed later in this chapter. First, I turn

\[218\] Although there is no quantitative difference in the reporting patterns, it was the senior students who were most likely to challenge me about this issue.
to considerations of students’ views on the policies and practices they encounter in between.

**Views on Educational Policies and Practices**

When asked how well informed they were about the educational changes currently under way, 5% (N = 208) of students thought they were well informed, 38% felt somewhat informed, 46% considered themselves not well informed, and 11% said they were not informed at all. Despite the constant media coverage and in-school turmoil (described in Chapter Two), when the students were asked to list proposed reforms that they were aware of, most had difficulty thinking of more than one or two. Most frequently mentioned was the elimination of the OAC year (24%, N=169). Teaching time was noted by 18% of students, but they were uncertain whether teaching time was to increase or decrease. School closures, funding cuts, standardized tests, strikes, new curriculum, changed school hours, and class sizes were all listed by more than 10% of the students. Thirty-seven percent of students also listed something that was not an actual reform. The most common of these was the curtailing of extra curricula activities, which was a result of teacher action against the changes, but had the most immediate effect on the students currently in high school. However, if this had been a group exercise, the students would have collectively succeeded in identifying almost all reform proposals.

In a subsequent question, students were presented with a list of actual reforms, worded to parallel OD statements about each. The students' responses to these items are shown in Table Seven. It should be noted that the official presentation of these reforms tended to put a rather positive spin on some of them, and issues such as exactly how much more time teachers would spend in supposedly smaller classes was a matter of hot debate in the media and at school council meetings.
TABLE SEVEN: Opinions About Proposed Reforms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHANGE TO THE EDUCATION SYSTEM</th>
<th>KIND OF EFFECT %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N varies between 201-209</td>
<td>Very Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fewer school boards in Ontario</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fewer non-teaching support staff (janitors, counsellors, secretaries etc.) in each school</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fewer vice-principals and section heads per school</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers spend more of their day in the classroom.</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased bargaining power for teachers’ unions</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Province-wide testing of students’ achievements</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents have more say about school programs</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More funds for computer and engineering technology programs</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less preparation time (spares) for teachers</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students must pass a literacy test to graduate</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students must do 40 hours of community work, on their own time, in order to graduate</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in Grades 9-10 must choose between academic-stream and applied-stream courses</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Grade 11 on, students must choose courses geared to their chosen destination (university, college, or work)</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average class sizes are capped at 22 students</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More opportunities for apprenticeship job training</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students held varied opinions on most of the reform issues, but the majority did not oppose changes that promised to improve their future skills, such as passing a literacy test and taking opportunities for job training. They were particularly enthusiastic

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219 Students were not invited to make a ‘don't know’ response. In order to indicate this the student had to write it in. I respected that degree of determination about it and included those responses in the analysis. Whether to invite this option or not is a difficult decision, but student collaborators...
about increased funding for technology, increased involvement of parents, and smaller classes (which is how they interpreted the promise of capped classes). They were more likely to view as negative, proposals that would reduce school staff.

During the follow-up sessions to the questionnaires, and during the interviews, it became apparent, however, that students were often confused or doubtful about the implications of the proposed changes and felt that both the government and the teacher federations tended to present biased views. The following quotes provide just a few examples of their thoughts on the proposed reforms:

It’s all happening right in front of me, but hey, I don’t know what to do about it. I can’t really say that many things about it, because I don’t really know that much about it. But I only understand what teachers explain. I’m not saying it’s all bad, they should stand up for their rights – that’s good, but I just don’t know very much about it. I wish I did …Like I hear on the news, but that’s only Toronto…. Its in the commercials, they want to higher the standards of education and they want students in Canada to do better than they did before, so it’s like it will be a lot harder, more competition…. it’s no great biggy to me because I get to go to OAC, but for the grade 8s, that’s going to be tougher – they’ll get less than the generation before them. I’m worried, especially if I have children and stuff – it’s not getting any easier, it’s just getting harder. [186M9]

Well, I feel like I don’t know anything concrete. Like I’ve heard teachers talking about a lot of changes, you know, but I don’t know what changes exactly… because the ones who tend to talk about it don’t like it. So, I don’t know if the ones that don’t talk about it do like it. Like a lot of the teachers don’t like the changes necessarily because they want input into what they teach and so I hear it from them. And then I did hear some public announcements on TV with Mike Harris about Bill 160 when that was going on…..Most of what I hear is just talk you know, and I don’t know if when they talk they think we know what’s going on, but no one like sits down and tells the kids this is what they’re thinking of doing. But maybe you have to get that just from reading the paper or something. Maybe they expect that, you know. [79F12]

It’s not our education that's compacted into one year, it's theirs. I was at the bus stop and some adults were talking about it. I wasn't listening in, but they were talking pretty loudly, and they were saying that the kids who were the last people to get OAC were going to be disadvantaged and I majorly disagree with them …. It pretty much angers me that all this stuff is going on that affects us and we don’t get a say in it. We’re left in the dark way too often about what’s going on. [112F9]

warned that students, especially younger students, would choose the easy ‘out’ if offered it. Chapter Five includes further discussion of what ‘don’t know’ and denial responses may signify.
Several things are evident from the above quotes. First, students do not think they are well informed, but they wish that they were. Second, the reliance on adults, for information and opinions is again apparent. Third, the students do not just accept what they hear uncritically. They seem to especially question the way they and their teachers are positioned in the reform discourse, but feel at a loss to obtain and evaluate all sides of the issues – never mind actually do anything about them. All of these points are relevant to the discussion of student agency in Chapter Five, and also pertain to issues of information gathering and decision making discussed later in this chapter.

Although students often felt ill-informed about the specifics and ramifications of reform policies, they generally held definite opinions about everyday school level policies and practices. During the interviews, when students were first asked their views on educational policies and practices, it was the school level practices they volunteered, and they generally had to be asked directly to consider the macro level reforms that were taking place around them. Such issues as school uniforms, violence and drug policies, administrative and school guidance practices, and rules concerning use of school space were raised. Most frequently mentioned were points relating to teaching practices and curriculum content and effectiveness, with the latter being generally related to the former. Students seemed to think that a good teacher could compensate for content shortcomings whereas the best designed curriculum could not overcome poor teaching.

**Reflections on Teaching Practices**

The majority of students (between 70 - 80%) rated teaching quality, teacher interest in students, and the availability of academic help as quite good to excellent. This was another questionnaire item that provoked considerable questioning from the students in the survey follow-up sessions. The rating was for teaching overall, but
students felt that this provided a distorted picture that minimized the problem of poor teaching when it did occur. During the interviews, discussions with the collaborators, and the student focus group sessions held at the observation site, the detrimental impact of poor teaching practices was raised frequently as an important student concern. As a researcher, I was invited into the classrooms of teachers confident in their practice and so I enjoyed observations of teacher-student relations at their best. As I walked about the schools, I was nevertheless, aware of less constructive classroom situations. I have heard teachers yelling at and berating students. I have heard students yelling and screaming in classrooms over which they had gained total control. As a parent on a school council I have shared with students the frustration of seeing nothing done about a teacher repeatedly identified as employing negative classroom interactions and/or ineffective teaching methods. Such teachers are in the minority, but their impact on the students unfortunate enough to be in their classes can be pronounced. Most students will cope; but some will be academically and/or emotionally devastated.  

Students’ concerns around teaching practices fall into two basic areas: teacher attitudes and teaching methods, although attitudes inevitably impact actions. In terms of attitudes, the words ‘caring’ and ‘approachable’ came up to describe qualities students valued in their teachers. Respectful/disrespectful communication interaction between teacher and student was also important, but is better suited to the focus of Chapter Five because it relates to matters of agency and constraint. Suffice it to say here, that students want to be able to respect their teachers and that involves perceiving that the teacher respects them as ‘real’ people.

A particular example of the link between attitudes and teaching practices is the issue of accommodating student learning styles. Although it is a well-established

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220 See Appendix D for a table of the thematic frequencies within the interview data.
cognitive fact that students have different learning styles and needs, participants frequently complained that some teachers either refused to go over material a student did not understand, or merely repeated the original (not understood) explanation. If a teacher also berated and belittled a student for not understanding, the impact was far-reaching. Although very few teachers were actually abusive, I certainly heard about those who were, mostly from observers rather than the actual target of these attacks. Such teachers affect all students in their classes - it is a brave student who will ask a question knowing s/he risks public humiliation for so doing, and news of an abusive incident will have reached most of the student population by the next morning.222

I found that students do employ the good-bad teacher dichotomy in their discussions of teaching practices, but their arguments differ from the infeasible ‘saint or scapegoat’ rhetoric employed in the OD (see Chapter Two). Instead, students’ definitions of good teaching focus on effective teaching methods, with a ‘bad’ teacher being one who fails to employ these. Furthermore, students are willing to weigh the pros and cons, settle for imperfect but effective teaching, and even consider the influence of limited resources, system constraints and student attitudes on teaching quality. The reflections expressed in the following quote present and contrast a number of elements that students feel determine effective teaching:

I’m thinking of one particular teacher, well just in terms of what he could teach me, who wasn’t a good teacher….teachers don’t have to be really intelligent, but they should know their stuff…and he didn’t….He tried to get by just being buddies with the kids, which kind of insulted me too. You can’t just kind of make a joke of it all and have students think this is the best class ever [pause]. I don’t know though, It must be hard for teachers ‘cause like, if they do have to stick with

221 For reasons why some students cope better than others see Chapter Five, especially the section “The Negotiating Agent: Navigating Structure In a Context of Social Risk.”

222 The student grapevine is a remarkable thing and I’m sure text messaging (breaking into the cell phone market, and therefore, school arena shortly after data collection was completed) has enhanced the speed of news immensely. Many students also possess a working knowledge of course availability and teaching practices at schools other than the one they attend. Student folklore (as Everhart (1983) terms it) is no more, or less, accurate than other kinds of informal network knowledge.
certain guidelines, they want to prepare you for the exams, and then they have to be kind of matter-of-fact about it, but the teachers that I like mostly are the ones that are able to deviate from the guidelines – you know, talk to you….But I've had some teachers that are really good….There's one teacher that was really good because she knew everything that there was to know pretty much, but if she didn't know the answer to something, she wasn't all embarrassed about it, she would say, ‘OK. Well I don't know, but I'll try to find that out,' and she was also intelligent, and she was funny, and she never had to raise her voice or anything because everyone respected her….She didn’t think that we went home and did our homework all night, or that we should even, but she expected our work to be good and she made it really fun. Actually mostly what probably made her a good teacher was that she loved what she was doing…but she didn’t expect our lives to revolve around it. See, there was a good math teacher that I had and that was her problem. She was good because she loved it, she knew everything, but she actually—it well she made us work a little too hard, so the classroom atmosphere was a little tense because she did expect so much of you…and also the problem was that she expected everyone else to feel the way she did about math, which is a mistake…she taught it well, and also you knew it well when you left the class, which is good [pause] But, well, she was approachable, but not enough. She wasn’t a teacher who was really easy to approach. [79F12]

Fairness of teaching practice and parity of course content and grading are also important to the students. In high school there are frequently multiple sections of the same course with the senior teacher setting the examinations for all sections.

Complaints were frequent concerning differing course content and the unfairness of exam content that was biased as a result. Because of such experiences students often thought more standardization of curriculum and evaluation would be an improvement.223

As one student commented:

It should be more objective, less subjective because I just know your marks can have like a big range depending on who your teacher is…just last year to this year I have dropped 9% in English….[the teacher has] a reputation of like being one of the hardest English teachers in the school….When you have to compete against someone else…it is hard to compare marks, especially when it comes to [university] acceptance. [251M12]

Another student took the issue of parity further, pointing to inequities between schools and school districts:

223 As well as a frequent interview topic, complaints about parity and unfair evaluation were a constant issue for the school council on which I sat. Agent #1 and her friends talked about the problems at length and repeatedly. Based on this I have to conclude that there is a lack of consultation among teachers delivering the same course.
Where I came from before, it was nowhere near the standards that are here...Here, they were doing a lot more stuff that we were supposed to be doing, but we weren’t doing it. I think it was because I came from a Board that wasn’t - didn’t have a lot of funding....I think it’s about time that they made things standardized across because it’s a lot easier for when you move from one place to another.....every school’s supposed to have all the same things to cover, but I guess it depends on the resources that they have.... So, I guess what they could do is make sure that the resources are available for all the schools to be able to do these things. [147F12]

At high school entry, students have spent a minimum of eight years on the receiving end of teaching practices - who better to evaluate practice effectiveness? Those who teach, train teachers, and set educational policy and curriculum would do well to listen to what students have to say about effective teaching. Participants in this study presented balanced views and were articulate in identifying which teaching methods aided, or impaired, their learning experiences.

**Information Gathering and Decision Making**

The results presented earlier in this chapter, concerning educational and career aspirations, paint a rather bleak picture of student efficacy in making sound choices and preparations to achieve their goals. While this may be true in terms of the likely outcome of some of their choices and decisions, all the students with whom I have interacted are, nevertheless, active, multi-source information gatherers, who discriminate between sources depending on the information needed and the intended application. Just like adults, some of the students are more adept at information assimilation and application than others, but they all make an attempt to reason about the choices they must make.

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224 This student subsequently remarked that the Ottawa schools were "very resource-full.” Distribution of resources was a reform issue used by the government to justify changing the funding formula. The government did not propose bringing standards up to the level enjoyed in ‘resource-rich’ school districts, but rather to take money from such boards, supposedly to give to poorer ones. The student went on to also reflect upon the role poor teaching might also have played in the failure to cover curriculum areas.
Table Eight lists a range of information sources and indicates how frequently students are inclined to use them. The table compares usage for school projects with that for personal interest. The table shows that some information sources are used consistently more or less regardless of the purpose, but for most categories there is a noticeable variation in frequency of use depending on whether the information is for school or personal interest.

**TABLE EIGHT: Students' Use of Information Sources**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOURCE OF INFORMATION</th>
<th>USE OF SOURCE % compared with Personal Interest (PI)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school library</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The public library</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A university library</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Internet search</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School guidance departement</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask my parents</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask a friend</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask a teacher</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look in reference books at home</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use a CD ROM on the topic</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Yellow Pages to call about it</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My school text books</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These shifts in use are what might logically be expected for appropriate information seeking: libraries, text/reference books and teachers are consulted more often for school projects, while friends and parents (drawn on fairly for school work) are used even more frequently as sources for matters of personal interest. The Internet is an exception to this pattern being the most frequently utilized source for both school and personal information.

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225 It is worth noting that the Grade 9 students are less likely than the seniors to use their text books for school projects. This suggests that students are entering high school without a strong understanding of the importance of text book content.
Although students are seeking information from multiple sources, Table Eight also suggests a general underutilization of some sources. Most students do, often or sometimes, use at least one kind of library for school projects, but frequency of library use could improve. In particular, Ottawa has two university libraries that are accessible reference sources, but these are infrequently utilized by high school students. Furthermore, libraries are used much less often for matters of personal interest. Internet use may negatively impact visits to the library (and may also have a role in the very low use of telephone inquiries). However, if the Internet were simply replacing other information sources, one would expect almost all students to report often using it, and this is not the case. To the extent that the Internet is the primary information source, educators need to keep several questions in mind: What affect does this have on the quality and reliability of information gained? Why are around 20% of students seldom or never using it? What role does home access, or lack thereof play in this?

Particularly glaring is the failure of students to use the school guidance department as an information source. Although guidance counsellors and materials may not be relevant to a school project, they should be a port of call for personal interest about careers and universities at the least. Use of the Guidance department was greater for Grade 12/OAC students for both school and personal purposes (p <.000), but even so, only 42% often or sometimes used it. Low rates of influence for guidance counselling and materials were also reported (see Table Nine). Again, influence rates were higher among the senior students (47% compared to 20%, p<.000), but this still suggests that over half of graduating students are not engaging with a school.

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226 Grade 12/OAC students are more likely to use a university library (21% compared to 7% in Grade 9, p <.01).
227 The interview data do include some dialogue that might allow further exploration of these questions. However, the scope of the dissertation discussion has to remain limited.
department that should be a key source for education and career planning. Some of the students who did use these services said they were helpful, but on the whole students were more likely to turn to their classroom teachers for advice on courses and careers. Other study participants and the collaborators offered considerable comment on why so many students avoided the guidance department:

About knowing the right credits, I don’t know that I have a lot of time to talk to the guidance office. I’ve tried to go and talk to them and I’ve asked them, and they gave me a pamphlet to read. It has a page or two on what I want to do – the media. They tell me I need English… but nothing really concrete about the things I need to know. [255F12]

Say you go into guidance and you’re having some problems and it’s a busy time, like at the beginning of year schedules and all this, they’ll make you wait. Some people, like friends, waited from the morning until lunch and then they gave up. And I’ve waited there for a couple of hours, but ah, I mean it’s a busy time…[but] staff, they just pretend you’re not there; and the secretaries, they never tell you anything, or they ignore you…none of them make eye contact or look up, until you’re really ready to go away, and then one of them will come and say, “can I help you.” And then they don’t know anything about it….The difference…if you come in with your parents, or if your parent calls, or your parent walks in with you and says like, “my child needs this,” they get up and they go, “Ok, Ok.”… When you talk to them, they’re superior to you, and you’re just sort of like a product. Like if you walk in and you need a schedule, they’re just “ssh, ssh, ssh,” at the other end. But if you walk in with your parent you see their body language change to where your parent’s in charge, they work for your parent, and your parent’s the customer, and things get done a lot faster and more effectively. But, ah [pause] I tell this to my sister, “if you have any problems, make sure dad goes in with you” [laugh].

R: Do you think that it’s the same for all students?
S: Well, I imagine if your parent came in unshaven, looking kind of scruffy, that that might have a different response. You know, it’s how you comport yourself and dress, but in general, yeah, it’s the same for all students. [104M12]

Why don’t kids go to counsellors for advice or social problems? I mean, they are trained to help you in such situations. There is a very simple answer to this: counsellors do not interact with students on a daily basis. In fact, we rarely see our counsellors at all…because we do not interact, we do not trust! Trust is a key factor here. We usually go to people whom we trust to unburden ourselves from our problems… I conducted a few interviews through a “Peer Helper” program of new students to our school, and many said they did not even know how to make

228 Officially these departments are known as "student services" but almost everyone continues to refer to them as "guidance," to the point that using the term student services on the questionnaire would have likely created confusion as to what I meant.

229 Once again, there are some clear issues of social/educational capital and agency embedded in this quote, which I take up in Chapter Five.
an appointment with Guidance... So where do kids go for an expert's advice? A well-loved teacher, who we see daily, and seems to have information we may need. If counsellors want us to actually go to them out of our own will, we a) need to know who they are and, b) need to like them enough to want to talk to them...in my own experience...they are very unfriendly and unapproachable... couldn't even sort out my technical timetable problems for me, let alone give me some advice... A few of my friends/peers, myself included, were almost reduced to tears (this is no joke) as we sat in the office of a certain guidance counsellor, so much that I rarely set foot in guidance anymore... I considered writing a letter to the principal or an article in the school newspaper, but eventually decided against it. I hope that was the right decision. [Agent #5]

Agent #1 and her friends also had frequent complaints about a process that involved making an out of class time appointment via a hostile receptionist, only to find that appointment was not observed by the counsellor, who (when the student finally managed an audience) did not have the necessary information or technical skills to resolve the student’s problem.

In the course of my research in schools I have talked with a number of guidance personnel and spent considerable time in their departments. Unfortunately, my observations tend to support the negative comments of the students. In my experience most counsellors are well meaning and try to assist students to the best of their ability. They labour in difficult structural conditions and are over-worked, under-resourced, poorly informed, and inadequately trained. Many counsellors that I have talked with have themselves volunteered such observations, along with their frustration at their lack of power to address these problems. Counsellors further complain of spending most of their time on clerical administration that could be performed by a competent clerk and dealing only with a minority of students who seek them out or are sent to them because they are a 'problem.' As a result of these structural limitations, when counsellors do get

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230 Agent #5 was a collaborator specifically asked to e-mail input on this issue following her participation in the career development conference. Particularly alarming about this account and those of Agent #1 and 104M12, is that they come from exceptionally articulate, assertive and high achieving students with lots of parental support. If such students are intimidated and frustrated in their communications with Guidance, what of the more timid and less able students?
to interact with students they often lack both accurate factual information and the set of personal skills needed for successful communications with adolescents. Instead, their personal knowledge about the job market is driven more by the OD than actual facts. They tend to adopt the stereotypical notions about adolescents (discussed in Chapters One and Two) and do not take the time to really listen to and encourage students to explore options. Raising consciousness among counsellors is necessary, but will not be sufficient to resolve the problems. In-school, school board and, ideally, ministry level administrators have to recognize the need for increased resources that first provide counsellors with adequate training and useful and accurate information, and then allow curriculum based opportunities to reach the students, gain their trust and answer their questions.

Receptionists currently act as gatekeepers to guidance material and counselling. They are key to encouraging student engagement with guidance staff. In two of the study schools the receptionists were polite and friendly, and students were able to book appointments and browse the material in a welcoming atmosphere. The reverse was the case at the other sites. There is no reason for any school administrative staff to be rude and hostile to students, but it is a common occurrence and a situation that needs to be improved.

The preceding discussion indicates that students encounter barriers to obtaining needed information via school guidance departments, and also that they try to find ways to compensate for this. But information assimilation is just one step in the decision making process. Students must evaluate the information they have and decide how to apply it. Cognitive and problem solving abilities obviously have an important role in this process, but so does the social context surrounding it. Table Nine shows what factors
students reported as influencing their decisions about the future. In keeping with previous studies, students' perceptions of interest, ability and achievement are reported as major factors (Kelly, 1988; Mura, Kimball & Cloutier, 1987; Ormerod, 1981; Stratton, 1994).

TABLE NINE: Influences on Students' Decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INFLUENCE</th>
<th>Definite Influence</th>
<th>Little or No Influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What interests me</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What I think I will be good at</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My current level of school achievement</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends/peers</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The jobs I think will be available</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work experience I have already had</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Things I read and hear in the media</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My financial situation</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My future plans for a family of my own</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other family members</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brothers and sisters</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance material</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance counsellors</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite the established reliability, when the meanings of the concepts of 'interest' and being 'good at' are examined, the explanatory power of these items is somewhat dubious, as they appear to lack substance as measures of what actually influences choice.\(^{232}\) Asked to explain what makes something interesting, students tend to resort to synonyms and other broad concepts (e.g., something I like, enjoy, I'm good at), which bring us no closer to understanding what determines such feelings. Furthermore, people

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\(^{231}\) One receptionist was a trusted confidante to a number of troubled students. One young man would just come at lunchtime and sit by her desk (she took lunch once students were back in class). She speculated that “he just needs a safe place to be.”
have highly variable definitions of what it means to be good at something.\textsuperscript{233} For example:

R;  So, what you had said you thought was most important in influencing you, was what you thought you would be good at and what interested you. Ah, how do you decide what you’re good at? What is that to you?

S:  Ah, I don’t know. Well I don’t know that the final decision is always the best, but whenever I like to do something, I think I’m good at it, because it comes easily. So, I mean, my grades have always been pretty good, but not in science, but I think I could have - if I’d worked at it I could have done it pretty well. I suppose I can’t say really, but I wouldn’t say I was good at it because it doesn’t come as easily as other things…but I wouldn’t say I judge by the mark – um, well not, not at all. OK, well I do – but if I do something quickly and I get a good mark, in one subject, but in something else I spend a lot of time on it and get the same mark, I’ll assume I’m better at the one that took a little time. And also like if you’re good at talking to people; or like good at writing essays. Um, as for what I think I will be good at, well I just take my experience and what I like. Like if I’m technically good at it and I really like it, I feel like I’m doing good at that.\textsuperscript{79F12}

More research is needed to fully unpack these concepts, but it is likely that other experiences, information, and interactions are the underlying determinants of these common, but vague perceptions about influences. Concrete factors such as actual school achievement, work experience and job availability are also acknowledged as important factors in decision making, but it is clear from Table Nine and data already presented in this chapter, that students actually rely very heavily on people close to them, especially their parents.\textsuperscript{234}

\textsuperscript{232} Compared to previous studies the wording of some items in the present study has been changed a little as a result of pilot testing.

\textsuperscript{233} An illustration of this is provided by the quote from 147F12 presented later in this section. I first discovered this lack of explanatory power during the interviews for my 1994 study, and have subsequently confirmed it with the pilot and collaborator sessions for this study, as well as in interviews in the present study. I have also asked adult workshop participants to explain these concepts and found their responses similar to those of the students.

\textsuperscript{234} As noted in Stratton (1994), the wording of questions asking adolescents about parental influence is important. If the questions in any way suggest that the adolescent does not decide, they will deny this degree of parental control over their choices (and indeed have plans to thwart parental attempts to dictate their decisions). However, if the adolescent is allowed to indicate degrees of influence on their choices, they readily admit the role their parents play. Interestingly, although all students reported a high rate of parental influence, 86% of the senior students claimed parents were a definite influence, compared to 75% of Grade 9’s (p < .05).
In practice, students consider and weigh a number of the listed information sources and influences in order to make course related choices and other present and future plans and decisions. The following two interview extracts illustrate the way students seek and apply information for various purposes. In the first extract, the Grade 9 student comes from a low-income, somewhat transient family that is struggling to provide their children with needed educational resources. He notes teachers, friends, and things that interest him (particularly skateboarding) as influences in his course choices and academic engagement. He is clearly trying, but probably not successfully making the wisest, or best-informed choices. In contrast, the second extract shows an articulate Grade 12 student engaging with the issue of information sources and influences. Both illustrate the interactive relationship of the front line trio of teachers, students and parents that I discussed in Chapter Two.

S: Well, I’d probably find out [about course choices] from like teachers, ‘cause I remember last year….I picked core, but they were saying if you picked advanced you wouldn’t have to do French again. So, I’d probably find out from teachers which way I’d be able to pick the classes to get credits faster. But a lot of my friends were going into core, so I went into core too, and they didn’t want to do any hard French. [pause]

R: So, kind of between asking teachers and what your friends are doing?

S: Ah yeah, ‘cause I like staying with my friends. Like, I’m not going to be going to this school next year…. 

R: … I was interested in the things you said on the questionnaire about using the Internet. I noticed that you do use it to get information for school projects –

S: Yeah.

R: Um, although you don’t have it at home? Is that right?

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235 For one thing his comments about choosing a level for French in Grade 9 is mystifying - there were officially no ability levels in Grade 9. He was also obsessed with skateboarding throughout the interview. However, on reviewing the transcript I noticed the important role this interest played in the development of his thinking and his attempts to engage with formal education and be willing to learn. The entire transcript is a particularly good example of the start and stop process of the developing thinking typical among the Grade 9’s, and how self-repetition takes the thinker further into the issue.

236 It should be noted that while there were noticeable trends based on age, the differences in communication styles and apparent reasoning patterns cannot be reduced to factors of age or gender. Older students tended to be more articulate, but not always. Among the Grade 9 sample, female students tended to be more articulate than males, but there was no obvious gender trend among the older group. Academic achievement appears not to be related to the ability to think conceptually and articulate reflections. See also Stratton 1994 and 1996a on this.
S: No. Ah, we had it. It was like $20 and you get to use the Internet, but then it went bankrupt...and then we never got it again. Then our computer broke and it's in getting fixed. And so I just use the Internet here at school to do projects 'cause they give us time during class to go to the library. And I use library books, but this library doesn't have many books on certain subjects. Like, I did a project on skateboards for plants for science ('cause plants make wood or whatever) and they didn't have any books on that, so I just kind of thought it in my head 'cause I know a lot about it.

[pause]

R: You did it on making things with wood, or on woods?
S: OK. It was about – we were doing a plant section and it was about – we had to pick material that comes from plants, and I picked the wood coming from the tree....But usually when I do projects, I can't find the books so I have to use the encyclopaedia or the Internet....The Internet doesn't work out for me very well most of the times. Like when I was trying to find things for the skateboard project, I was trying to find the tree the skateboards come from, which is a Canadian Hardrock Maple, and I was trying to get pictures and information on that to get like a two page report on it, but they didn't have it in any of the books or the Internet and I didn't like it 'cause of that. But for anything else it usually does, except things I like. Unless it's like cameras – they have a lot on that I'm sure.

R: Where did you learn to use the Internet – at school or at home?
S: At home. Well, yeah, my Dad got it for us, then my Dad has a friend who came over and showed us how to use it for everything.

R: Where did you learn to use CD ROMS? You said you used them occasionally, but not very often.
S: ....well my aunt actually, she works in computers a lot. Well, it's not her business actually, but she has one and the family uses it a lot....But we learned typing at school. [111M9]

R: What I'd like to know, perhaps you can tell me, is how these things work together – so that when you get this information, how you decide...
S: Yeah. Well, for school projects you can use the media. Like for school projects you kinda know what you are looking for. Say you have to find – you're doing an advertising project and you have to do advertisements – then you're gonna find one, like milk projects. And if you're looking for a specific topic, then you just go and look for that specific topic. But, really what I find is that the media is very biased, and I don't like the way they do things a lot, and so I don't use them as a resource unless I have to. Like I said, if it's for a school project and you know exactly what your topic is, and you know exactly an area you can go to that's not too one-sided, then you can use it. [Looking at the items on her questionnaire that R has open] Um, friends, parents, family members – they all sort of fit into a group where you can go and ask them about information and see what they think about your decisions and stuff, and consider their feedback and stuff like that. Teachers and guidance counsellors and the material they have are pretty good too. I personally go and see my parents and family

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237 Female students were less likely than males to report the media as a definite influence (p <.05).
members and friends first, before I would go and see teachers and counsellors. But if it was like a really big decision or whatever, I’d probably go to both because they are very good for that kind of stuff [pause]. Yeah, my financial situation influences my decisions pretty much, because I’m one of those people, if I don’t have it then I won’t do it, and if I do want to do it, then I’ll figure out a way that I can, so that I’m not in a great deal of debt, or whatever [pause]. I guess the current level of my achievement in school is pretty important because it kind of has to do with what you’re gonna do in the future. Well, for what I want to do it’s very important, because I need this stuff to get into a program for what I want to do. And if I don’t, well that is going to affect my future ‘cause it’s gonna change it a little bit! [laugh, pause]. My interests are a big affect on my decisions – or anything. You have to be in the stuff that interests you, otherwise if you don’t, you’re doing it to please other people and it’s not going to work out at all. And you’re not going to be happy and you’re going to be like 40 years old and not happy with your life – and that’s not good [laugh].

R: What makes something interesting for you?
S: Well, for picking the type of career I want to do – I’ve always liked being around people and trying to help people, and so, that’s why I picked a career where I could do that, because that’s me – the type of person I am – and that’s what I like to do. [pause] So, it’s just stuff like that.

R: So it’s just stuff like that? Um, how do you know if you’d like something?
S: [Pause] I guess – I don’t know – it’s kind of hard actually. Um [pause] well if it really appeals to the way I am and the way that my feelings are it interests me; but if it’s something that doesn’t really appeal to the way I am – as a person – it wouldn’t interest me at all. See, like business – that’s not interesting [laugh], but nursing is because I get to do something that I like to do, so [pause]

R: Thank you for trying to answer the hard question. I know it was a hard question...
S: Yeah [laugh] – well I tried! You have to think [laugh]

R: What if there’s a conflict of information. You say you go to your family members and others if it’s a big decision so you’re getting many points of view. How do you deal with it if there are different opinions? What do you do?
S: What I do is, I take everybody’s input...and listen to what they have to say, even if they don’t agree or whatever, weigh the pros and cons, and then at the end it basically still comes down to I decide from that. And in that way, you’re using everybody’s ideas and kind of it makes it easier when you are making a decision. [147F12]

The latter student’s closing remarks make a very clear claim of social agency - she gathers information from a variety of sources, she weighs the relative merits of her sources, and then she decides. But this is not a simple, even process; entwined within the excerpts above there are many elements that relate to topics addressed throughout this chapter and Chapter Five. Paramount to understanding the ways in which
individuals exercise agency and the outcomes of their actions are the circumstances of
the social context in which they act. Students may be in the same city, even the same
classroom, but they do not act within identical social contexts. The examples above (and
those cited in the earlier section on exiting high school) underline the role of influential
others (especially parents) on students' plan development. Although there are a few
cases of parental disengagement, most students reveal parents striving to help and
courage them through the process of getting an education, although they bring
markedly differing social/educational capitals to the attempt. In Chapter Five, I discuss
the components of students' agency in detail and illustrate how those whose parents
have limited capital to bestow, act on their own behalf in an attempt to compensate what
they lack and mediate a social context of risk. Before turning to these considerations I
conclude this chapter with a summary of the implications and considerations for
educational policy and practice.

**Implications for Educational Policy and Practice**

It is important to reiterate that the results and conclusions presented are based on one
localized and exploratory study. That said, the data presented in this chapter point to
places to begin for further research and for changing policy development and teaching
practices. Both the quantitative and qualitative results demonstrate that, given the
opportunity, students are active, optimistic, information-seeking social agents who will
engage in constructive dialogue about their educational experiences, choices and
aspirations. What they have to say has substance worthy of a policy response rather
than merely the "sympathetic ear" suggested by Hall & Dennis (1968 p.99). The number
one recommendation that I can make therefore, is that parents, educators, politicians
and policy-makers provide opportunities for constructive dialogue and then actually listen
with open minds prepared to learn from what students can tell us.
It is true that the results are also discouraging in terms of the efficacy of students’ efforts to make choices and decisions that maximize future options and achievement. In addressing these problems it is important not to conflate actions as a social agent with the efficacy of the outcome. These young people are indeed very social agents who turn to the adults they most respect for good advice. Unfortunately, these adults are often not always well informed themselves, and often not fully aware of the degree of influence they have on students’ decisions. If such reliance is misplaced, students’ decisions are impaired by incomplete or inaccurate information. The discussions in this chapter concerning future aspirations and decision making underline that the lack of sufficient and accurate information is a potentially serious impediment to making good choices about high school courses and post secondary programs. The qualitative data show that the students know this. Regardless of opinions and critiques they may hold on the matter, they have heard and registered the OD about the social and economic necessity of educational achievement. Their own aspirations may be a little fuzzy, but they are aware of, and want to meet, the high hopes that their parents have for them. Consequently, many students feel under pressure, and although they try their best, they are barely muddling through. If we take time to listen to them, we will hear that they need, and are asking for, our help. This must be flagged as an area in need of policy and practice attention.

Providing the help students need requires change, both to individual attitudes and knowledge levels and to systemic policy. An individual can effect change to varying degrees, depending on their ability to influence others: a guidance counsellor with good information and increased sensitivity to student needs can positively influence every student with whom s/he interacts; a teacher can change the dynamics and knowledge level of a classroom – influencing many hundreds of students over a career span; a

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See my discussion in Chapter One re this in the context of Giddens (1976).
school principal can change the knowledge base and attitudes of a entire school community. Effecting change to the education system in general will never be easy. At a minimum it requires the front-line social agents to work together as a community. Even then, as Chapter Two well illustrates, there is no guarantee that governing departments and the politicians who lead them will respond by endorsing constructive change. As I write the conclusion to this chapter, Ontario has just elected a new Provincial government – one that claims to be committed to investing in education. Perhaps now will be a fruitful time to campaign for real systemic change that involves students, teachers and parents in developing effective policy. Without support at the macro level of the education system, it will be difficult for schools to establish all of the changes needed; nevertheless, it is only at the level of the school that any change can actually be effectively implemented. The TY program is an example of what happens when policy is imposed from above without consultations involving both teacher and student in their philosophical purpose and practical viability. If policy makers are genuinely concerned with constructive change, they must recognize the importance of including, not alienating and demonizing, front-line experience.

Students repeatedly asked me if my research would make any difference. Would teachers, school boards, or governments take any notice? I was able to tell them that I knew at least some teachers and principals would listen, but beyond that I could promise only to try to be heard on their behalf. Although Ministry support and resources will be necessary to bring about all the change that is desirable, there is fortunately much that can be done at the school level with resources already available. Summarizing the data and implications presented throughout this chapter, I highlight the following four areas where effective action for improvement can be taken at every level from the individual to the Ministry: well-informed informants; filling in the knowledge gaps; improving the social context; and, involving students in policy discussions.
**Well-Informed Informants**

Data presented in this chapter repeatedly point to the high level of reliance adolescents place on information from trusted adults. During the course of conducting this research I had occasion to speak often with other parents, teachers, school guidance counsellors and other career development professionals and it became apparent to me that even supposed experts in the career development field had little knowledge and understanding of the ‘big picture’ of Canadian employment distributions or educational requirements, costs and opportunities. Adults also frequently underestimate the degree to which adolescents are actually listening to them. Many adults ‘buy in’ to the stereotypical image of the teenage rebel acting only to thwart authority. They mistake a student’s insistence that “I make up my own mind” for a total disregard of adult input. Influential adults need to improve both their understanding of adolescent interactions and thought processes and the accuracy of their factual information regarding the relation between possible careers, educational qualifications, options in attaining them, and actual job market employment. Much of this can be achieved by individual effort but, as already noted, school counsellors in particular need resources and system support to become really effective agents in optimizing constructive, viable student decisions about education and career goals.

This study also points to the important role that peers play in student decision making. Again, I suggest that many adults (including researchers) tend to assume stereotypical notions about negative peer influence and as a consequence misunderstand the important and positive social and educational value of friendship networks. Recent research into dropping out has identified social exclusion as a primary factor (Dechman, 2003; Kelly & Gaskell, 1996; Tanner et al, 1995), and data from the present study show how inclusion in peer networks provides important educational
Some students are particularly popular with other students and/or take on school leadership roles. It is important for these influential peers to also be well informed, because other students will be turning to them for advice. Parents who are in a position to pass on accurate information to their children should not underestimate the effect it has - nor the potentially negative impact of failing to do so. Teachers and school administrators can harness this potential student power by seeking to involve and accurately inform influential students, always remembering that information and learning flows in both directions. 

Filling the Knowledge Gaps

As established above, students’ career aspirations and educational decisions are not well grounded in accurate knowledge about what is actually needed to achieve them. Well informed informants can help to change this, but the social constructionist world view suggests that information alone is not enough. To understand the relevance of information to personal action, we must be able to recognize its application to the social context of our lived experience, and as data excerpts have illustrated, this is an important part of students’ reflective process. Accurate information on careers and related educational requirements can be provided, but students must still relate this to what they personally know about the world. I flagged earlier the potential problem in this regard that is created if students do not know, cannot, or will not, relate, information about parents’ employment and education experience to the factual information they

239 This is illustrated and discussed more specifically in Chapter Five.
240 And this should be regardless of whether or not the influential student is popular and compliant with teachers. In fact, taking a particular interest in the views of a ‘rebel’ student and engaging him or her as a collaborator for change and improvement can be particularly effective, as many excellent teachers can attest.
241 Debates about definitions/conceptualizations of ‘information’ versus ‘knowledge’ were a notable part of the dynamic discussions of the New Approaches to Life-long Learning (NALL) network, of which I was a part (see www.nall.ca for many papers generated by this alliance). This is a complex debate, but my view is that reflection on information and experience leads to knowledge – this is in keeping with the social constructionist stance on constant re-construction of what we ‘know.’
gain elsewhere. This is an example of a knowledge gap – a cognitive place where contradictions and inaccuracies can exist unrecognized and thus, unchallenged.

Influential adults, especially those with power in the educational process, must avoid making assumptions about what students know, and/or need to know. Routine practices and values that intimidate those who lack formal education need to be confronted\textsuperscript{242} and educators and policy makers should challenge themselves to find appreciative inquiry approaches to addressing these and other knowledge gaps.\textsuperscript{243}

**Improving the Social Context of School**

We all act within layers of social context. The macro socio-economic climate undeniably affects the experience of getting an education but is mostly beyond the influence of parents and educators as well as students. Shifts in social awareness can and do have a positive impact on the conditions of schooling. Awareness of gender and racial issues, although far from perfect, are examples of progress in improving the social context of schooling.\textsuperscript{244} A large body of research has probed gender differences in relation to MST choices in terms of education and careers pathways (Stratton 1994) and concluded that different cognitive constructions rather than actual achievement drive these patterns (Eylon & Linn, 1988; Linn & Songer, 1991; Robertson, 1992; Tilleczek, 1993). A decade later, and despite the now well established fact that females achieve as well or better than males within any subject area they choose and throughout high school and university, these patterns of gender differences are mirrored in the present study. As has been discussed, the results point to gender differences in the perception

\textsuperscript{242} That these attitudes and practices (rather than student desires and intent) are what actually bring about “cultural reproduction” via the school system is, of course, essentially the position taken by authors such as Bernstein (1977) and Coleman (1988).

\textsuperscript{243} "Appreciative inquiry" uses consultation with a community about its positive strengths to address community detriments. There is an extensive web-available literature concerning its applications.

\textsuperscript{244} Further discussion of race, religion and other issues in the social context of schooling occurs in Chapter Five.
of abilities, with female students holding generally more negative views about their skill acquisition, especially in MST areas. While quantitative data in this study identify these issues it cannot explain them, and unravelling this was not the focus of the qualitative interviews, but it is a cause for policy and practice concern that continues to require further investigation. Female students do seem to be eliminating themselves from computer and applied science fields; on the other hand, males over-aspire to these areas, and neither sex seems to hold realistic assessments of either personal ability or social opportunity. Answers are not currently available, but at the school level, increased awareness about this matter can help us to ask more probing questions when advising students.

Another social context issue highlighted by this study is the matter of students’ overall workloads. Studies concerned with student work invariably focus on the amount of paid work performed concluding excessive paid work (above 15 hours per week) is detrimental to school performance. Feminist literature has long pointed out the problem of considering only paid work when attempting to understand actual labour contributions, but to my knowledge, other research has not examined the total workload of students, or argued that school attendance should be counted as work that is specifically mandated as preparation for labour force participation. I take that position here and argue that adults in general fail to understand the social context of student work and underestimate their total workload commitment, which is in fact similar to that of an adult working full-time. Students are under pressure to save money for post-secondary costs, to have

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245 Previous research has been primarily quantitative and persistently lacked explanatory power. Research from cognitive psychology has pointed to the role social situated cognitive construction plays (see Stratton, 1994), but sociological research using qualitative approaches with students has not pursued these insights (see Chapter One).

246 Everhart (1983), who situates his ethnography in a Marxist framework, does view students school attendance as an exchange of labour for needed commodities (credentials for future employment) and this is particularly relevant to my discussions in Chapter Five about students’ structure-agency negotiations.
disposable income that allows them to fit into the available peer networks, and to engage in extra curricula and volunteer activities that supposedly provide good future experience and/or 'an edge' when applying for scholarships or jobs. Teachers and parents need to have a more accurate understanding of the social context of work as experienced by high school students so that they can better assist students in managing these demands.

**Involving Students in Policy Discussions**

Students do have opinions on macro and micro level educational policies. They complain of not being expressly informed, let alone consulted, about policy changes. They want to be informed when policy changes are considered and implemented and be told about the intended purpose and possible affect of proposed reforms. Whether or not such issues should be discussed in the classroom became a controversial issue during the tempestuous period of Ontario reform, but media attempts to hold such discussions with students have been notably successful. As discussed earlier, contrary to popular views about teenagers, the study participants proved very capable of identifying effective teaching practices and considering school policies in a balanced way. Indeed, in the context of the adult-generated vitriolic rhetoric surrounding them, they offer a shining example of rational thought.

Involving students in policy development does mean that everyone must have the courage to take risks together, just as students, teachers and researcher did in putting on the tableau described at the opening of this chapter. That exercise in

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247 And all of this occurs in the context of a consumer culture with the added pressure to posess and display the 'right' material goods.

248 In Chapter Five there is further discussion about this that develops the nuances of students concerns around such knowledge and its implications. They want to be included and consulted, without having to shoulder total responsibility for policy decisions and available educational options.

249 See the CBC radio phone in referred to in Chapter Two. A debate with high school students and political candidates was held by CBC News World on the eve of the Ontario election (*Counterstrike*, Wednesday, October 1, 2003).
collective risk-taking paid off. I close this chapter with another example of successful student risk-taking. The following list of school-level policy requests was generated with the assistance of the student collaborators, some of whom then accompanied me to a professional conference to present them. The list is an example of the kind of policies the students want. They seem so reasonable and modest that it is hard to believe that most schools fail to consistently provide any of them:

- A welcoming, friendly, and encouraging place to go for information
- To be respected as people capable of acting in our own best interests
- Access to information and counselling at hours that work for us.
- To know what kinds of jobs and education options are ‘out there’
- Clear, accurate, up-to-date information related to meeting our goals
- To know the levels of education needed for possible career goals
- To know the levels and subjects of courses required to reach those goals
- Encouragement and support in meeting the goals we set
- To be offered manageable alternatives when a goal seems out of reach
- To know what to expect when we get to university, college, or work
- To know how to seek accurate information for ourselves
- To be encouraged to effectively express our needs, hopes, questions, and fears
- To feel ‘safe’ when we do express those needs, hopes, questions and fears.

I suggest that this list might be adopted as a set of basic policy recommendations. Surely ways can be found to implement them?

250 The conference was NATCON, 2001 (see Stratton, 2001b). The list was based on study data. This version has been edited slightly.
CHAPTER FIVE

"Well, It's Kinda Hard To Explain, But Know That We Know"²⁵¹

In this chapter, I address the third primary research question: What are the relationships between the social context of education and the students' views? Such a consideration involves elements of the first two research questions already discussed in previous chapters, but here the focus is on the more theoretical elements that pertain to a reflection on structure, agency and resistance issues. In Chapter One, I said that the views the students offered in this study would be the measure of my critical review of previous sociology of education literature, and the value of my suggestions for a synthesis of theory. I took the position that notions of agency and resistance have generally been conflated and that untangling them will involve looking at the component parts of what counts as social agency. This includes the construction of self-and collective-identity, and the processing of constraint, choice and risk factors involved in taking action from a particular world-view. In that regard, I considered the existing theoretical contributions and limitations of Giddens' (1978) notion of 'structuration, Foucault's (1991) thoughts on 'governmentality' and discursive practice, Goffman's (1961) work on the 'total institution,' and Chamber's (1997) discussion of the complex and relative power hierarchies among human agents.

In this chapter, I present data concerning five related areas of the students' views and reflections: agency perceptions of self and others; perceptions of structural constraint or enablement of personal agency; how the official discourse on education (OD)²⁵² is, or is not, reflected within students' views; the presence of resistance themes; and, structure-agency negotiations in a social context of risk. Throughout, I consider the

²⁵¹ Student 112F9, from a longer transcript passage included in this chapter.
²⁵² OD is used throughout to denote the official discourse surrounding 'getting an education" as explained and defined in Chapter Two.
theoretical implications of the students’ views and conclude that they challenge previous conceptualizations of structure-agency relations within the school and other closed institutions, and most particularly the role of ‘resistance’ in those relations.

**Students’ Perceptions of Agency: “Know That We Know”**

In general, perceptions of social agency have been measured by looking at the degree to which individuals recognize the self as someone with ability to influence the circumstances of themselves and possibly others.\(^{253}\) In this study, students were not asked directly about perceptions of control over present or future decisions and possible outcomes. Rather, they were asked about their future plans and goals and related educational choices.\(^{254}\) During the qualitative interviews, students were encouraged to explain goals and choices, along with their overall experiences of going through school. Thus, the perceptions of social agency and structural constraints that emerge from these accounts were spontaneously generated by the students rather than forced as responses to a pre-packaged concept constructed by the researcher.\(^ {255}\) The insightful and complex nature of their comments on self (and others) in relation to the structure of education and society in general is, therefore, all the more remarkable. It is also, as the student cited in the title of this chapter suggests, quite hard to explain coherently.

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\(^{253}\) This has been done with quantitative and qualitative research and obviously, measurement details have varied considerably. I think my broad definition, however, is a fair summary of these approaches. A considerable amount of research on education and youth is interdisciplinary (routinely crossing boundaries between the disciplines of sociology, psychology, human development and education). I think it is, therefore, important to note the alternative terms used to get at the sociological notion of ‘agency,’ especially as the terms of ‘identity’ and ‘efficacy’ are probably better understood across theoretical and applied disciplines.\(^ {254}\)

\(^{254}\) Both the questionnaire and Interview Schedule ask related questions. See Appendix C and Appendix D for details.

\(^{255}\) Of course, as researcher and reporter I control what is presented here. Nevertheless, I think sufficient qualitative data are presented to allow others to judge whether or not the themes I suggest are present and some students have been involved in viewing and presenting some of those themes elsewhere.
For the sake of creating some sense of orderly flow to the development of my discussion I begin with data and comments that illustrate students’ understanding of themselves and others (particularly parents and teachers) as social agents. I then move on to discuss perceptions of structure and resistance to perceived constraints. Previous approaches to students’ agency, structure and resistance have provided a legacy of conceptual language that suggests a linearity and discreteness that I must recognize and address; yet it is an imposition into which the data do not comfortably fit.\textsuperscript{256} As will become apparent, the students’ sense of themselves is strongly socially situated, not as structural conformers or resisters, but as skilled negotiators.

\textbf{The Self as a Social Agent}

It was apparent from the students’ interview transcripts that most perceived themselves as active social agents. The most common type of social agency statement was an assertion of choice in and control over decisions, typically those related to course selections (43\%) and career paths (62\%).\textsuperscript{257} Fifty-five percent specifically described actively seeking multiple sources of information in order to make such decisions and/or to complete schoolwork or achieve another goal. This process of information seeking and decision making has already been presented and illustrated in Chapter Four, but it is important to note here that claims to act as a social agent are almost universal among students.\textsuperscript{258} Regardless of what constraints may be present on

\textsuperscript{256} I think this is a serious and barely recognized problem faced by those employing critical knowledge and collaborative research approaches. The nature and/or implications of the uncovered knowledge is sometimes so far removed from academic patterns of speaking and writing about it that it becomes difficult to convey within the traditional parameters, which remain essentially unchallenged. See Rose and Stratton (in progress) on this matter and Flynn-Burhoe (2003).

\textsuperscript{257} \(N = 58\) (the number of in-depth interviews) for all percentages in this chapter.

\textsuperscript{258} Only two students failed to make clear claims of choice and control. One of these was a Community Living Program student who found the unstructured nature of the interview difficult. Both these students did, however, make statements that challenged or resisted the constraints of the educational structure. I noticed a tendency for students with an absent or weak sense of social agency to note more constraints and unmediated risks than other students. But, the
available options, or what the outcomes of agency acts might be, the perception of
themselves as social agents is seen by students as a fundamental right—developmental
and social. To strive for power and control in life is perhaps merely human, but that is
the point to be made here—adolescent students do not differ from adults in this basic
claim of social agency.259

This fundamental drive to be acknowledged as a social agent is, I think, best
illustrated by a Grade 9 student with developmental disabilities. Unable to manage
regular school classes and curriculum, this young man attended the Community Living
Program (CLP). When asked during the interview about his future plans he responded:

I want to get a part-time job, like pizza [selling]. I want to start taking OC Transpo
to school by myself because the van is sometimes too noisy. And, because
everyone else (even in my class) takes the bus. It’s time I learned to take the OC.

This student was well aware of his personal limitations, but nevertheless formed rational
goals within those parameters that would maximize his ability to act as a social agent on
his own behalf. One of those acts was to take on the challenge of participating in this
research, which required a greater than usual test of his ability to persist and
concentrate over an extended period of time.

In the context of discussing bringing about change in the conditions of schooling
at the local level, a Grade 12 student commented more directly on the positioning of
students in the social agency hierarchy, protesting their right to be taken seriously and
treated equally:

We’re all human beings. We should all be treated the same. I’m not saying that
everything I say is right, but if a kid complains or something, he could be lying—
I’m not saying like you have to take action on what he says— but at least think

numbers are small and this is an interesting aspect of structure-agency relations that needs far
more attention.

259 That some sense of being able to control and influence our circumstances is essential to our
mental and physical well-being is well-established in cognitive and social psychology research.
The implications of this for sociological theories of agency do not seem to have crossed the
disciplinary boundary particularly well.
about it – what is this kid saying about this person? Is he right or is he wrong? Don’t just say nothing, or say, “no - there’s nothing we can do." Give that person a chance. They deserve a chance, just like everybody else. [72M12]

The desire to be included/recognised as a competent social agent was a frequent theme. Such demands were generally quite modest and well reasoned, as is the case above – the student merely requests that his views be heard and considered, thus providing a ‘chance’ that his actions can have a larger social affect.

The ability to influence outcome by individual effort was another strong agency theme within the students’ discussions with 50% claiming the ability to affect school experiences and outcomes by taking deliberate individual action to do so. Most students clung to the belief that they would succeed in high school and beyond if they chose the right courses, worked hard, asked for extra help when needed, and if all else failed, get a course transfer or went to summer school. Although such views clearly reflect the individual (rather than structural) responsibility element of the OD (discussed in Chapter Two), the students were not oblivious to structural constraints – as will be apparent in the development of this chapter. Furthermore, although students claimed their personal social agency, they did not see themselves as lone-agents; nor necessarily, collective agents. Rather, they perceived opportunities to act in conjunction with others in order to advance their own influence over events. As one young woman explained:

I personally feel that this questionnaire was a wonderful idea, because people need to know our views on school and the future. Getting into the workplace these days is extremely hard and quite competitive. I myself feel that I will be able to get into the workplace with ease, thanks to my teachers and parents who gave me the confidence to be self-motivated. I would like to see more kids my age as concerned as I am for the future, as they don’t realize how important our decisions are now [that] will affect us in later life. [112F9]

In terms of agency-structure relations, this short statement is highly complex. First, participation in this research is noted as an agency opportunity. Next, the OD is

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14% of students commented specifically on their participation in the research in this way and 24% asked questions about the research process.
reflected in the acknowledgement of a competitive workplace, which also entails a recognition of possible structural barriers. Personal agency in overcoming such obstacles is expressed, but as an ability assisted by other agents. Finally, the more subversive sub-text of the OD is reflected in the observation that few students are as aware and self motivated as she is. Such complexities are typical of students’ reflections and underline the importance of considering how their sense of agency is socially constructed and situated.

The types of agency claims discussed so far are related more to engaging with, rather than resisting, the structures of formal education. Regardless of the degree of dissatisfaction they might harbour concerning the process and conditions of getting an education, the students wished to succeed in the venture of formal education. As already illustrated in Chapter Four, and recurring throughout this chapter, many agency acts were directed to this end with decisions being carefully weighed. Choices to go against parental or school authority, or to take a direction that differed from peers, were not taken lightly because the input and support of important others is an essential component of the development of effective social agency. Students negotiated to manage the tensions that inevitably arise in finding one’s own position among multiple pressures and viewpoints. A young student illustrates such negotiations in the following quote. He resists authority pressure against his involvement in skateboarding, but simultaneously attempts to appease his father’s disapproval by impressing him with a more acceptable interest (and possible future career) in film making and editing:

So mostly, It’s just my friends telling me if I’m good or not really. My family kind of influences me too sometimes. My Dad doesn’t really like [skateboarding] that much. He thinks I spend too much time doing it. I know I spend a lot of time doing it, but it’s what I like to do, so… [as] well, I think I’m good at editing. I showed my Dad our video and he said it was really well done. ‘Cause there’s not any mistakes in it, so it’s all like good – like real videos. [111M9]
The research participants appear as thoughtful and very social agents, who construct understandings not only of their own actions, but also of the actions of others in relation to themselves and the larger social world. In particular, they measure themselves against their peers and the other two groups forming the frontline triad of the OD – teachers and parents.

**Teachers as Dual Agents**

Unquestionably, students recognize that teachers can be powerful agents in the development of their young lives. Already discussed in Chapter Four is the impact of teaching practices on students’ ability to successfully manage the academic side of school. A caring and effective teacher enables the agency of students, but even indifference on the part of a teacher can be experienced as a serious constraint by some students. Students also frequently mentioned their powerlessness to influence teacher behaviour in and out of the classroom, but this aspect is better addressed in the subsequent section of this chapter that deals with students’ perceptions of constraints.

Despite their recognition of this direct teacher to student power, students do not consider teachers to be powerful agents in a systemic sense. In Chapters One and Two I discussed the ways the teacher-student-parent hierarchy of agents is embedded in research and policy literature. Although each is presented in dual and contradictory ways (particularly within policy discourse), overall, teachers as agents of the educational system are constructed as the most powerful of the three in that context. As is probably already clear from the data and students’ comments cited in Chapter 4, in the students’ hierarchy of authoritative social agents, parents rank first. This is at odds with the positioning of dominant knowledge agents within policy and research literature. It is

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261 Students relate those qualities to teaching practices. Some students also described their teachers in agency terms, as follows: powerful, positive agent 54%; powerful negative agent 12%; Constrained but active agent 12%; Indifferent 19%. None viewed teachers as not having social agency, i.e., as puppets or dupes of the system.
understandable in developmental and emotional terms that children should be closer to their parents than their teachers, but after years of exposure to school and the accompanying educational discourse, it might be expected that high school students would consider their teachers to be more knowledgeable and powerful agents within that context. Interestingly, although students are well aware of different power hierarchies among peers and parents, beyond noting differences in teaching effectiveness, they speak little of power differentials among the teachers. Rather, students perceive teachers to be dual agents in the sense of being systemically compromised. That is, the role of teacher as agent of the system is perceived as a constraint on a teacher's ability to act as an independent agent. Failure to act to improve the school climate was mentioned quite frequently in the interviews. Students generally conceptualized this as indifference, which some attributed to an uncaring individual while others suspected burnout due to frustration at not being able to make a difference. In the Ontario climate of contentious reform, some students also suggested the conflict between the government and the teacher federations negatively impacted teachers' attitudes to students. As one student commented:

Some teachers care, but then other teachers are just like, “OK, that is no longer in my contract so that’s not my problem.” Well, I don’t know if they are like that, but then you have that body language from them…you just see it in them. It is just like when they see something [happening in the hallway]…they just, like walk through it. [251M12]

Others speculated that the students’ feelings of systemic powerlessness combined with the teachers’ constrained position leave the latter with little power to affect classroom conditions:

If you look at the high schools, 99% of the people are students, there’s only a couple of staff, and …you think like I’m going to go to school, I have no influence on the class, I have no say in this – that is the attitude…[262] As I recollect from informal conversations, some students made stronger statements about this suggesting that between the directives of the unions and the government teachers had no room to manoeuvre at all.
you get older and become a little more aware….no matter what [teachers] do, it's
going to come down to more like the attitude of the student than anything. I
mean…like the government’s just doing something so they can say – in my
opinion – “oh there’s a problem and we need to fix it.” There’s always a problem
that needs fixing, but they can convince the voters that they need this – just like
we need blue toilet water. [104M12]

It must be hard for teachers, if they do have to stick with certain guidelines
…They're not the be-all and end-all, they have to answer to someone….It almost
makes it not matter what they teach us….It's hard to fit in, in high school…people
have a hard time with friends and stuff like that, so it's easy to take it out on your
teacher…I just think teenagers - a classroom full of kids - is going to judge a
teacher pretty harshly….If they don't like the person they're probably going to be
stubborn and won't wanna listen to what the teacher is saying. [79F12]

The previous quotes show that at least some students are very aware of the
constraining weight of social structure within and beyond the educational system. On top
of their perception that teachers’ agency was constrained by that system, students also
perceived unacknowledged generational differences in social constructs as exacerbating
the problems.263 Although at some point during their interviews most students (especially
the seniors) made pessimistic or cynical remarks about the education system, they were
equally likely to offer potential solutions and suggestions for improvements. Even if their
hopes of actually affecting change were low, they appeared to see teachers as a key
target of action:

S: Well…some policies that [are] a bit silly, like no hats in school, stuff like that…
little things… that sort of show you that maybe the generation that teachers are
part of, doesn’t…want to change to accommodate us. Like it is silly, ‘cause
schools should cater to the kids, you know, and do what will make them come
out with a better education, and do what will make them feel comfortable…I
know that they don’t know…you can see they don’t understand…because well,
we’re not in your time anymore, you know. And, if teachers were just to
acknowledge that a little more I think it would make students feel more like they
- people were respecting the way they grew up and what they actually want. Or it
would just show that maybe other decisions teachers make aren't as silly,

263 Such differences were noted about parents too (see the example from 112F9 in the following
discussion of parents as agents of change). Generational differences in social constructions and
expectations were especially noted by the children of immigrant parents. However, students
generally perceived their parents’ motivation as one of caring, whereas they seemed to feel
teachers were not motivated to care or understand. I did not ask about this and it was not
volunteered, but I wonder if perhaps students hoped teachers might attain a more objective, less
emotional understanding of the adolescents’ social experiences.
because when you have silly policies it sort of makes you lose respect for any other decisions that those people make, even if they are good decisions. But if people show that they are open-minded, so then when you are in class, maybe you’ll, you know, say something which is maybe a bit controversial, maybe say something that you really want to know. …..I don’t know how seriously people would take this, or how honestly they would answer, but if we had like questionnaires, or just like teacher evaluations, I think that would be good – teacher evaluations by the students. And, like, I don’t know if it would change things on a greater level, but that would – I don’t know [pause] – I think that would be a good idea. Something like that [pause]
R: Why do you think they don’t do things like that?
S: [pause] I don’t know. Well, it sort of makes you feel like there’s sort of an adult against kids thing. That the adults don’t want the kids telling them – like the kids ratting on other adults, you know what I mean?
R: Mmm
S: I don’t know if that’s true but it sort of would get rid of that feeling if they did it. And it seems silly ‘cause it shouldn’t be that way. It should be that the principal cares if he’s hired someone who isn’t doing a good job, or the kids don’t like, but it doesn’t seem that … the principal would go, “Oh, OK, I understand that; the teacher’s bad, I don’t want you to have that.” It always seems like adults against kids, which is kind of silly. [79F12]

As this young woman thinks aloud in the presence of the researcher, she confronts as “silly” the divisive undercurrents that characterize the structural organization and discourse of education. Her suggestions for change are advanced as tentative possibilities within a questioning framework. The lack of dogma in this student’s discourse is typical and notable in its contrast to the dogmatic rhetoric contained within the OD.

Parents as Agents of Change

The social discourse that oppositionally positions parents and adolescent children is pervasive. Students, in both this study and my earlier research, also admit to concealing the degree to which they value and rely on their parents for information and advice. Their confessions to the researcher in this regard must therefore come as a surprise to many adults. The power students’ assign to parents as social agents extends beyond the role of advisors – they also perceive parents as having the most power to change school conditions, at least at the local level. As the young man cited in Chapter
Four said, “if you walk in with your parent you see their body language change to where your parent’s in charge” [104M12]. Another student recounted how parental input can deter negative teacher-student interactions. Talking about the poor content of an art class and the negative way the teacher picked on students and their work she commented:

I think at parent-teacher interview time some of my friend’s parents yelled at him. Now he doesn’t say anything….If [parents] find out their child is uncomfortable they can go to discuss it and get something done. [191F9]

Clearly, parents can also be passive or negative agents in terms of their children’s educational lives (and of course other aspects of social development). The examples are given in Chapter Four of the challenges facing the young woman already living on her own [73F12] and the likely structural response to the parent who arrives at the school “looking unshaven and kind of scruffy” [104M12]. It is possible, although not discussed in the interviews, that parents’ socially inappropriate interactions with the other agents of the school (teachers, parents and student peers) can render them negative agents in the educational experiences of their children. Other research (such as Dei, 1993) and my own informal conversations with parents suggest that fear of having a negative influence leads some parents (typically those with low social capital) to avoid interaction with school personnel and organizations such as school councils. What becomes clear in the interviews, however, is that such parents are generally not indifferent or passive in regard to their children’s educational experiences and outcomes.

Parents with low educational capital frequently attempt to use, or encourage their

\[264\] Individual parents, just like individual teachers and students, can of course, be unreasonable and/or abusive in their opinions and interactions. However, when students were discussing these issues in the school council focus groups and in the interviews they always focused on examples where the negative practices extended beyond their individual experiences.

\[265\] Through the collaborators I do know about instances of such negative impact on peer groups. The parental behaviour involved was extreme. I pick up some of the issues involved in the later section “The Negotiating Agent: Navigating Structure in a Context of Social Risk.”
children to use, their social networks to compensate for this lack. Gaining access to computers and to more desirable schools were notable examples of this.\textsuperscript{266}

At the other end of the social hierarchy, parents with high educational and social capital were sometimes in danger of undermining the positive influence they had on their child, as a grade 12 student explained:

Well, parents, especially my dad, with him being so academically oriented, pushes all the time. He writes these cheesy little letters, I find on my desk when I get home, “[name], I read your essay and I think you could improve on this.” Then, he’ll always give me exam tips and ah, he’ll always tell me about universities like, “get into a good university and you’ll be surrounded by, like, the good students, and that’ll make you smarter by hanging out with them”… My parents are good resources…I can go to them and they have good approaches and good strategies, good examples of how I should do things. But at the same time I feel that it’s not really me. And they caught me playing video games. Like, If I’m stressed out I play video games, ‘cause it’s a good way to escape…. [My Dad] comes up, and he doesn’t see it…I think he’s a workaholic and he never really takes any time, or a break for himself, or anything. And it pisses me off sometimes. Like I’m obviously stressed, and I know what I have to do, and I’m just trying to relax a bit, you know, and he’s, “how come you’re just playing”…But, ah, I know he means well. [104M12]

The last sentence above echoes the attitude of the majority of students I talked with – they are convinced that their parents have their well-being at heart. At the same time, there is also recognition of parents as fallible and sometimes less effective social agents than the students:

More-or-less, we go to friends if we want to talk about social stuff and what’s going on in our life, and how we feel. Not that we’re not close to parents, but friends are closer to it, going through it maybe not long ago. Sometimes if you go to a parent or teacher - they’re not really dismissive of it but – they say it’s not a big deal, but they’re not there right now, and to that [teen] it is a big deal, and teenagers more get the idea of that – they have more of an eye-level on it…. [But] it’s like asking an adult to pretend they’re a teenager again and they might not remember how big the problem was…. A lot of times it is almost the teenager who may have the higher maturity level ‘cause they are going through stuff that is forcing them to grow up. Now that adults are grown up they more have the chance to act immature almost…[but] we have the chances to prove ourselves a responsible person. [112F9]

\textsuperscript{266} See the example from 111M9 in Chapter 4 in the discussion of “Information Gathering And Decision Making.”
Before I turn to a discussion of students’ perceptions of collective agency, a little more needs to be understood about the tensions and contradictions of the students’ reflections on themselves as social agents. In particular, why do students so seldom reveal to adults in authority (teachers and parents) the value they place in gaining their attention, respect and help? The very insightful Grade 9 student cited above, attempted to further explain some of the complexities that lead adolescents to both want, and not want, control over their lives and decisions. She talks about the risks involved in knowing, not knowing and being known to know! Reflecting on the fact that it does not always seem that teenagers are concerned about their future she explicates:

Some people have an idea that we don’t know what’s going on... So it doesn’t seem like a lot of us are concerned, and I think we should be represented by somebody – somebody who’s hired, obviously an adult – who can say, “look, there’s kids here who know what’s going on and they need to be told.” A lot of adults have their idea and they don’t realize we think, we watch the news, and we know what’s going on, and we really would like to be told more about it – not just left in the dark....I think maybe kids are reluctant to talk about it because when we’re watching the news we see – they have lots on government, lots on the school system. For a while back they had a big focus and it was constantly stories about [education], and we heard about it, and it’s frightening. And, I think some kids don’t want to say, “that’s going to affect me later on,” ’cause they’d rather just ignore it. Not really go into denial, but sort of say to themselves, “this is not going to affect me that much – I’m not going to make a dumb decision - things will be fine.” And a lot of kids are reluctant because they don’t want adults to know that they have kind of an idea what’s going on...well, it’s kind of hard to explain...like almost if we’re left in the dark [we would] rather have the adults know we’re left in the dark....More-or-less like the adults get the idea we may not know what’s going on and we’d rather have them think that than have them know we do know what’s going on....I don’t know really [why]. It’s not really – nothing to do with self-confidence, but the more we make ourselves the target - put ourselves in the spotlight for attention from the media even, parents, teachers – the more the chance we’re gonna get recognized. A lot of kids they don’t want to be recognized for this and would rather let what happens happen, and they don’t want to be given the choice to say, ‘do I wanna get this, or do I wanna get that for my education?’ Some kids are scared of making choices because they’re afraid that if they make a wrong choice it’ll affect them majorly in the future. Sometimes we feel we should be given a choice, but when we are given the choice we are afraid of making the wrong choice. We’d rather have adults who are wiser and more knowledgeable of the circumstances make the decision. But, we want a say; we want people to know that we know what’s going on. We don’t necessarily want to be the ones who say this is what happens, because we are young; but we want at least people to know that we know
Fear that being recognized as a knowing, thinking social agent will result in the adolescent being expected to take full and unassisted responsibility for choices and future outcomes is coupled with a deep resentment about being assumed unknowing and unthinking. The appeal is for the empathetic and competent adult agent who will act as mediator. In order to understand the students’ views on collective agency, resistance and the content of the OD, it is essential to recognize and understand this position on self-agency.

**Collective Agency? Maybe**

Theories concerning resistance have traditionally focused on raising the consciousness of the subordinated group in order to promote unity for action. As discussed in Chapter One, in the sociology of education literature it is the teacher who is the activist agent working (depending on the orientation of the theorist) to civilize or enlighten the less conscious and competent, subordinated student group. The students’ perceptions about their teachers’ social agency offer an immediate challenge to this conceptualization of the teacher as a reified agent. As individuals, students have a strong sense of themselves as active social agents, but do they perceive the student group as a collectivity?

At some point during their interview 41% of students indicated a conceptualization of students as a specific group in relation to the social structure of education. Beyond this, however, many students struggled with the idea that students might act as a group to bring about change. When asked directly if they thought that students can influence their educational experiences in anyway, the first response was

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267 Noteworthy is the way this young woman (14-15 years old) enters her developmental maturity and life-experience into the equation concerning her ability as a decision-making social agent.  
268 Outside of Sociology of Education literature, social movement theorists such as Melucci (1989) have challenged this traditional idea of collectivity and developed more nuanced notions of action for change, but even so, as I have argued in Chapter One, the idea of subordinates in need of enlightenment by more aware and able others tends to remain.
almost always focused on actions an individual might take to make the experience of going to school better. When specifically prompted to consider students as a group, 21% thought collective student action could effect change at the school level, 3% thought it could work at the School Board level and 2% believed it could influence the Ministry. An additional 22% thought that maybe it was possible although they had never seen it happen, and 16% considered it just impossible.

Even when prompted to consider the idea, most students were not optimistic about collective action. Very few had any experience of students acting together purposefully and successfully, but when such experience was present it seemed to prompt more immediate considerations of students as a collective, as in the following example:

R: Do you think students can influence their educational experience, change things about school that they are not happy with?  
S: I think so. I think a whole bunch of students [pause]...Like I've seen kids in elementary. My elementary did a survey if they wanted recycling bins in the classes...and the next year we had them....I've seen it work...the same with computers. Kids wanted computers - like parents mostly - I've seen it happen a lot - surveys like the one you're doing right now. [186M9]

Such a positive response was rare and the involvement of other adult agents in this student's conceptualization is important to note. Generally, students who did articulate thoughts on the idea of collective student action were much more doubtful about either the possibility or the outcome. In particular, they spoke about what I would call a culture of competition and fear that works to first discourage and if that fails, punish, any attempts at united student action. In the first instance, participants described students in school as a diverse group more in competition with each other to succeed (academically and socially), and unlikely to be able to agree collectively about anything. In the second instance (as described by Apple, 1993; Everhart 1983, among others), any attempt by students to act against the authority structures of schooling carried negative consequences. Another young student had complained earlier about the treatment of
students by a particular teacher. When asked if students could change things she responded:

S: Well, you can't really change the bad teacher thing, but perhaps if a whole bunch of students got together and explained about the treatment thing [pause]
R: Why don't they?
S: Scared. They're scared of going up against an adult. You're taught to respect an adult, not question them. You don't know how they'll react…He might think his treatment of us is right. [125F9]

One of the senior students elaborated at length on the issues involved:

R: Do you think students in high school can, like influence the experience of high school; do you think they can change things?
S: Oh they do, they do all the time. I just don't know whether they're aware of what they are doing, that it's having repercussions. And there are all kinds of little cliques in high school of different people that do different things, that have different goals, [pause] like ah, there's a group of guys that love football... And then there's like girls …and they go to school and they're there together all the time and they do really well in school, and I'd imagine that's because together they do a lot of homework., and [that] is their socializing. They'll be like, “oh we get that problem. Do you want to work together on that?” And that's definitely influencing their progress. I just imagine that the cliques go on and on.
R: What about changing things about the school? Do you think students have any power to influence more like the rule structure? The way things are done?
S: Ah, [pause] yes, but the problem is that there are like 1300 at this school, not all of them – I mean, to bring about any major change it would take them all – like a majority collective sort of movement towards a certain thing. And ah, [pause] not all of them would feel that way. A lot of students wouldn't care, or feel differently, and not all of them would be… willing enough to make the necessary commitment to this movement, or whatever it is that they're trying to change. I mean, during the teachers' strike, when the teachers were going to go on strike this year with that work to rule thing, …there'd be those people who didn't want it [and]...people who wanted it. There's a difference in opinions – it's too broad to get anything changed by the students. I mean, obviously, if something was really bad, then if it affected enough students negatively, I'm sure they'd go to the principal and get the changes, but I find – I've seen students try to change things, and it all comes down to the same thing – missing more school. Like, ah, there was a recent thing, a teacher protest on parliament hill... and ah, [the principal] came on the P. A. like, “don't leave, blah, blah, blah, you'll be punished.” It was a Friday afternoon – a couple of hundred students skip the afternoon...[Monday the principal] makes an announcement, like condemning it and saying that he only saw about two [name of school] students there. 'Cause he went there – he took the afternoon off to go there! [laugh]....There's very little motivation to get students to do anything because there's very little to gain, and because they don't see – I mean, like you're older and you can compare different education systems and you can say that you're missing out because of this, or you could...
have this. But I've only seen like one high school experience – my own – and I
can't tell you that it was good or bad because what do I have to compare it with?
I mean it worked – I'm smarter [laugh] than before. I think I have what it takes to
get into university and move on, but ah, there's not too many changes I can see
having any influence. So again, I'd say if there was any movement to change
anything, I don't see any central gain, or I don't see how this will help me.

The tension between students' accounts of their individual actions and abilities as
social agents and their views on the motivations and actions of the student collective is
marked. Furthermore, there is the question of the risk involved in protest versus the
potential gain. There are many instances in the transcripts when students who have
made strong personal agency claims subsequently comment negatively on the
behaviour, attitudes and maturity of the student group as a whole. This was one
interesting way in which different elements of the OD about adolescent students was
simultaneously contested and absorbed into the students' discussions and I will return to
this point in the section on reflections of the OD.

I think that the students' views pose a challenge to previous conceptualizations of
both the collective, and collective action, for several reasons. It might be argued that the
degree to which students struggled with the notion of collective action merely
demonstrates what theorists have previously argued – they need to have their
consciousness raised concerning it. Perhaps that is true to a degree, but some students
understand the notion very well, they just dispute the viability of that kind of action.

Even if they do need some consciousness raising, who is going to do it? Who will unite

269 Another student also made a comment to the effect that I probably had some knowledge or
insight into the possibilities of collective action that she did not have: "All I'm going to know is that
everyone's confused... I don't know and you sort of do" [79F12]. Incorporated is the suggestion
that she possess insufficient knowledge to risk a commitment to action for change. She continues
to express doubts about students' motivations almost identical to those of 104M12.

270 It is difficult to know what silence means but it should not be assumed that students who did
not offer discussion about the possibilities of collective action had no notion of it. My impression is
that overall it was the younger students who had most difficulty talking about it. This may have
been merely because they were also on average less articulate, especially when it came to
describing complex thoughts and views.
them? Despite the Federations that exist to organize and create collective power for teachers, students do not see them as a powerful group of social agents. Doubtless there are among their teachers those who the literature would describe as critical/radical pedagogues. The students identify these individuals as ‘good’ and ‘caring’ teachers, but they see them as individuals struggling against the same structure and constraints as the students. Thus, it seems unlikely that teachers can inspire students to believe in the traditional notion of a united collective for change – that is, the idea that there is just one subordinated group that if united, can force the more powerful structural agents to change conditions.

Does this mean, then, that there is no hope for collective action? Probably it does: at least in terms of the traditional conceptualization. I argue, however, that the students actually have a surprisingly sophisticated understanding of working with others in order to achieve beneficial outcomes. They are very sensitive to the ways the formal education system, and for that matter life in general, both constrain and enable. They recognise the constraints of divisiveness among the student group, and between themselves and the other front line agents. This does not, however, stop them from seeking networks of allies among those groups, and recognising the power such liaisons can have to effect change.

I have already pointed out the potential for powerful influence that students afford parents, but when parents and teachers unite to bring together whole communities, major change can follow. Several students at one of the research sites mentioned how

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271 But the social context is dynamic. At the time of data collection both government and media were portraying the teacher federations very negatively, but as discussed in Chapter Two, a little later the federations won some major victories, interestingly by using one form of structure (the courts) to challenge another (the government). Subsequently, students witnessed school board trustees rebelling against the government. I wonder if these experiences changed students’ views about teachers’ collective agency an/or the possibilities of structural change.
their school climate had changed for the better and one student explained what he thought had happened.\textsuperscript{272}

I think it was the school. Teachers and students and parents got together – all the kind of different communities – to try to solve – to find a way basically to get along. We had several assemblies where they had to bring in police telling the kids that basically if the hard-headed kids kept starting the fights, what would happen to them if they got caught by the cops. Some of them understood, some of them didn’t. I think it was the school and the kids themselves that put themselves in the position to help others. [pause] Those – the ones that didn’t listen basically, and continued to fight, got suspended or got kicked out of school. [72M12]

What happened in this school involved \textit{collective interaction}, particularly among members of the front-line triad of educational agents. But, is this conceptually the same as \textit{taking action as a collectivity}? Can the formation of social and informal learning networks, and the exchanging of educational/social capital to increase the ability (competence) to act as an effective social agent be considered forms of collective action? If so, it is a very different conceptualization than that traditionally applied. If not, it is a new form of agency action – one that relies more on negotiation than confrontation.\textsuperscript{273}

\textbf{Perceptions of Constraint: “Your Life is Just Given to You in Chunks”}

At this point, I turn to a discussion of students’ perceptions of constraint that will consider parallels between the students’ accounts in this study and those presented in previous research. Some parallels do exist, but a full picture of the students’

\textsuperscript{272} That this had indeed occurred was known to the researcher. The impetus for what occurred, as some students were aware, was attributed to a particular principal. When he was moved from that school, it did in fact provoke an attempt at collective student organization to protest, which did not have a successful outcome.

\textsuperscript{273} This begs the question of whether negotiation is then a form of structural resistance, especially if the networking and capital exchanges are subversive. For example, at one point, a teacher (who had a history of clashes with school administrators), told a student who had concerns about his own treatment by a school administrator, to contact me as a “student-friendly parent representative to school council.” We worked together to find a solution, but the teacher and I never actually spoke directly to each other about it. I will return later to a consideration of ‘resistance.’
understanding of constraint can only be gained by viewing its entwinement within the larger framework of their negotiations with the educational process. As previously noted, students are highly conscious that educational success is socially enabling, and constraints are seen in this perspective. The following different forms of constraint could be identified in the interview transcripts:

- **Constraints attributed to educational structure** (50%). The structure and organization of education is perceived to hamper, rather than enable learning outcomes (e.g., adversarial reform, post-secondary costs, inflexibility of the system to learning approaches and content).

- **Constraints that are attributed to individual shortcomings** (41%). Possible constraints on educational and future social achievement are recognized, but attributed to individual circumstances rather than blamed on structural conditions. These include not being smart enough, not having the finances for university, not managing the workload required.

- **Constraints of general social structure** (38%). Constraining factors that arise from social structure beyond just the education system. These would include the failure of government to invest in education, lack of employment opportunity, and such like.

- **Constraints on personal freedom that are 'policed' by structural agents.** (29%) This kind of constraint tends to be in the form of institutional rules that apply to the student collective and not just the individual. Examples are freedom of movement and association, forbidden behaviours (e.g., smoking, music at lunch, gathering in the foyer) similar to the elements of Goffman's total institution and resistance points noted by ethnographers.

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274 The thematic coding (See Appendix D) divides this category into two parts: constraints attributed to personal social circumstances (41%), and those attributed to lack of personal ability (31%). Some students may have cited both kinds of constraints so I have not added the two categories here, but taken the higher of the two for this purpose.
• **Constraints due to social status as a non-agent** (24%). Statements that actions and participation are prevented because of not having a voice and/or being treated as inferior or a non-person.

• **Constraints arising from insufficient information** (21%). Explicit statements that a lack of good accurate information has negatively impacted choices and decisions.

• **Constraints arising from the acts of a system agent** (14%). These involve the individual actions of system agents beyond mere rule enforcement. Most common is poor teaching practice that negatively impacts the students' educational attainment.

Although acknowledged by students (even to the point of employing the prison metaphor\textsuperscript{275}), the everyday constraints on personal freedom, so much the focus of ethnographers and resistance theorists, were more an annoyance than a serious concern. Students’ did not like these rules, often suggested they were unreasonable and unnecessary, but nevertheless accepted them as a cost of obtaining needed education.\textsuperscript{276} This does not mean there was passive acceptance – a point that I will take up in the subsequent discussion of resistance. Most important for the moment is that students generally had a bigger picture of the matrix of social constraint as one student reflected:

\begin{quote}
I was talking to my friend and we were, I was just saying how like, I don’t know if it’s good or bad, but your life is just given to you in chunks, like pre, ah, pre-arranged, like someone else put them together for you. There’s your elementary school chunk, and then you deal with your high school chunk, and then there’s your four years in university chunk…. I’m ready to leave, definitely, cause I – I don’t know, I don’t know if I – yes, I’m eager to get out. Then, I’m afraid if I expect to much from university – like if I expect it to change my life, if I expect this chunk
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{275} Having likened school to a jail, one student explained, "I said that because I compare that to the situation between a prisoner and what would happen to a cop…even if I had six witnesses they’re gonna look at me and say, “well, this person is a teacher”. And I would get suspended for it and the teacher wouldn’t get anything. [pause] They want you to do only what they want you to do." [72M12]. Although a particularly outspoken and resistant visible minority student, he had every intention of graduating and going on to college.

\textsuperscript{276} Most students mentioned this kind of rule at some point, but usually during their discussion of school policies rather than in a context that clearly conveyed a perception of constraint.
to be the deciding factor in my life – and it doesn’t – if nothing comes together, then I’ll be really disappointed. [79F12]

Students’ concerns about the future (discussed in Chapter Four) and their recognition of constraints were closely tied. Even if they did sometimes feel life was being handed to them in pre-arranged chunks, constraints that were perceived to endanger their educational attainment, and thus future success, were of most concern as the following quotes illustrate:

R: You did have a financial plan about how it would be paid for if you did go to university or college, so have you thought about that?
S: Yeah. I’d rather it came from my money, rather than having to pay people back, ‘cause I wouldn’t be sure what I’d be doing in the future and if I’d be able to pay them back. ‘Cause the money is going up to pay for college and stuff. [pause]
R: Do you think your parents would help you out?
S: Oh yeah, they’d help me out. But both of them right now, they don’t have enough money, but by the time I go to college they probably will. But right now they don’t have a lot of money to pay for that kind of stuff [111M9].

It is like you hear some of these stories about those people who work in those like redundant jobs where they are almost like a robot once they walk in, and once they walk out they get out of this like trance or whatever – this mode of repetitious work. Being able to afford college. That is a concern considering the lots of increases in tuition. [251M12]

What bothers me is that my mother’s worked hard and went to university and now she has no work, yet my dad left high school went to community college and has a great job making quite a bit of money. I don’t know what to do; putting the time and money into university seems pointless because I may just not get a job in the future. I’m confused and I have little time to decide what to do with my life! [133F12]

These statements not only recognise and express concern about structural constraints, they also reflect and contest elements of the OD surrounding educational attainment and future success. As illustrated later, students’ concerns were usually accompanied by strategies to negotiate the constraints they faced. [278]

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277 In Chapter Four, a Grade12 student [147F12] is quoted concerning a similar financial situation, but with a more elaborated plan concerning parent involvement in using loans and paying them back.
Reflections of the Official Discourse: “If You’re Gonna Be In The Game You Might As Well Play”

Given the position taken in this dissertation that all knowledge is socially constructed, elements of dominant discourses would be expected to be present in the views of students or anyone else. Everyone (even a critical theorist) absorbs some elements of these discourses as unconscious, and thus unchallenged assumptions. The question is the degree to which these are accepted or contested. To what extent is there unconscious absorption or critical review? The interviews with the students reveal wide variation, not just among the different interviews, but also within the individual accounts and considerations as students sometimes engaged in self-debate. Wholesale, passive, non-reflective acceptance of the official rhetoric was, however, rare. If elements of the OD were accepted, then students usually also offered a reflective rationale for doing so (e.g., education is needed, that’s a fact). More often manifested uncritically was the subversive sub-text of the OD (pointed out in Chapter Two), a point I will return to after first considering students’ responses to the more direct reform rhetoric.

As also discussed in Chapter Two, the students in this study faced a mass identity reconstruction around their educational worth. A questionnaire component went to the heart of the way in which the educational attainment and competency of these students was being re-constructed as inferior and inadequate. The participants were asked: Do you think all the recent talk about education needing improvement will effect the way your graduating year is viewed by prospective employers? After rating the degree of effect they thought this would have, students were asked to explain their answers. Ninety-six students (46%) provided written explanations of their rating. Their

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278 Some examples of this have already been presented and discussed in Chapter Four.
279 N =209: 7% thought there would be a great deal of effect, 24% quite a bit, 24% very little, 11% none at all, and 32% were unsure. Logically, given their situation as part of the double cohort,
responses provide a strong illustration of the range of ways in which elements of the OD are reflected in the students’ world views and opinions. Three basic themes and four patterns of response emerged in these answers:

- Absorption (19%) - the OD was accepted and reflected back with out further comment.
- Denial (20%) - the OD was rejected either by claims not to know what effect the discourse would have or by denying any impact without offering a rationalization for that view.
- Debate (41%) - elements of the OD are reflected but accompanied by some form of refutation, questioning, expressions of doubt and uncertainty.
- Combinations (20%) - while debate themes revealed a questioning kind of uncertainty some responses combined theme elements in a more contradictory and unconscious way.

The following quotes illustrate these four patterns of response:

Absorption

The more you learn the smarter you get and if they improve the school we can have a chance to become something worthy. [40M9]

Because if I need better education I would like to get it for a civilized job. [33M9]

The younger generation will be more educated than us so I see a lot of jobs being taken over by them. [33M12]

Employers may think because of all the changes or lack of changes that we would not have sufficient knowledge areas (course work) or skills. [52M12]

Denial

I’m not sure how to explain it. [229F9]

I don’t know because I’m not really aware of what employers look for. [218F9]

I don’t know about what changes will be made. [03F9]
The changes won’t really affect us because they can’t. [119M]

I’m not really sure at all about what’s going to happen. I don’t think about it. [223F9]

During one of the interviews a student provided a more elaborate explanation of her denial response that marks it quite clearly as deliberate rejection. As the denial position becomes elaborated it actually crosses into debate. It is also somewhat reminiscent of the statement cited earlier about knowing and not knowing and raises a question as to whether denial can be considered a form of resistance:

I don’t know if I do want to ignore it, but it doesn’t seem like – yeah, I wanna find out, but it seems like everybody else is kind of, you know, ambiguous – they don’t know what is going on. Certain people want to do certain things and other people want to do other things. But there’s nothing definite for me to oppose. All I’m going to know is that everyone is confused, which I already know. [79 F12]

**Debate**

Despite changes in the educational system, I believe that potential employers should still give us the same chances for employment that we have now? [51F12]²⁸⁰

Because I’ll be graduating in 2000 and it might not be a good year. Politicians are going to screw it up for us. [86F12 CLP]

I’m not quite sure, but I don’t really think so. There are a lot of us, and I can’t see them turning all of us away. [46F12]²⁸¹

Depending on what the changes will be will determine the employer’s view. Changes could turn out good or bad. [55F12].

I am at the end of my high school years, and I doubt prospective employers will even think about or consider the “improvements” being made. [57F12]

I think sometimes employers look too much at your grades and not your work ethics or things such as volunteering. So basically the government is saying, that if you have a 90% in OAC English then you are not good enough? Come on 😊. [216F12]

²⁸⁰ Not all of the students’ statements were easy to assign to a category. This example might be considered either as denial or combination. However, because of the question mark placed at the end of an apparent statement, I decided it was a representation of debate.

²⁸¹ This quote also serves as an example of the way in which students do see themselves as a collectivity.
If education needs improvement, it has for years. Its stupid to not take someone on the basis that they might not have had a thorough education, because they and all the people hired before them went through the same system. [60F12]

The combination statements typically reflected some absorption of the OD coupled with an assertion that individual effort could win out. For example:

Regardless of the state of our education system if one chooses to learn and makes an effort, teachers, friends, family and other resources will help and guide them. I am confident that even though the national standards are fairly low, my accomplishments in the academic field show that our system is not as flawed as most people think. Perhaps people should start looking at other factors to “blame” like themselves [245F12]

I commented, when discussing issues of collective agency, on this separation of the self from the collective. I consider it to be a very important factor in considering the effect of the OD. As I said in Chapter Two, the OD contains a top level of rhetoric with which almost everyone agrees (education is needed in today's world, it should be of excellent quality etc.). Then there is the more insidious contradictory sub-text that polarises the front-line agents against each other. Students may contest personal incompetence and irresponsibility, but they tend to accept it as true of their peers, as illustrated by 104M12 in the earlier consideration of collective action. The self is different, but assumptions about the homogeneity of the group of ‘others’ are retained. Particularly, senior students tend to view their junior peers through the OD lens on ‘youth’ considering them to be more irresponsible and unruly than the older group had ever been:

Grade 7s and 8s, if you go out there, they’re swearing, they have no respect for anybody, they’re just, it’s awful. And I don’t remember ever being like that when I was younger [laugh]. So, I don’t know what’s happened, but I think something should be done to stop that, because, I mean, it’s just not right. You should have respect for somebody like a teacher or a parent, you shouldn’t be mouthing off to them…. [Grade]12s not so much….It seems to be that there’s a gap in there in those years for some reason and everything’s just different, and I don’t know if it’s like things changed in the middle in there, and different things were influencing them. I don’t know. Well, I mean, it’s not that much of an age difference really, but yet, it seems very different, the way that they value things,
the way that they treat people – very different. So something’s obviously happened somewhere, that’s made them like that. [147F12]

Like we had a problem with the bathroom...It’s just like the kind of people - three years ago that never would have happened. [pause] These students – I don’t have much hope. [pause] A lot of them are mouthy, disrespectful. [pause] [73F12]

As I noted previously, it is this divisive, unity destroying, element of this subtext that tends to be reflected by the students without critique. It is my observation that this element of the OD is commonly overlooked and therefore not contested in the counter discourse of adults. It is, therefore, a significant impediment to action for change that theorists need to consider no matter whether the conceptualization is of a traditional collectivity or a network of collective interaction. Heightening students’ critical reflection seemed to require little more than allowing the issue to be introduced into the dialogue. For example, the comments from 147F12 occurred during a consideration of school policies. Once she has raised the subject, she immediately moves into a reflective process on possible causes.\textsuperscript{262} In the case of 73F12, after the final pause indicated, she added, “and so do a lot of the teachers talk down to students, which I don’t agree with.”

When I asked some of the collaborators what they thought about this, their initial response (with laughter) was to say that they were sure they were never like that. After consideration they tended to concede they might have been and that the change was probably attributable to developmental maturing rather than broader social change.\textsuperscript{263} This seems to point to the importance of the insertion of the critical question into the discourse in order to promote the possibility of alternative views (Foucault,1991). When counter discourses are sufficiently present to be known to the students they incorporate\textsuperscript{262} Elaborating on this, R could probably have promoted further thought by S on the role of development without even straying from the recursive confines of the interview: She might inquire: “so you don’t think it’s just the age difference then?”\textsuperscript{263} As Agent #1 said during a telephone discussion, “we don’t want to think we ever acted like that in school, or buses, or malls, but they all do it. You see them year after year the same, and then about Grade 11 they change. And so we probably did and we just get more mature.”
these into their thinking (albeit unevenly at times). In Chapter Four, participant 104M12 states, “It’s the worst thing in the world to imagine getting those [university] applications back and not having been accepted.” He notes that so much is said about the necessity of getting an education that it is “imprinted on him.” In the following extracts from his interview he elaborates on how OD content affects him. Although his self-debate reveals many tensions and contradictions, he clearly is a critically reflective and active social agent.

I compare myself to other people all the time as a means of judging my, ah, my capacity with work, and it’s enjoyable – it’s evil to say – but it’s enjoyable to be better than other people because, ah – your effort and capacity are rewarded. …It’s just a high school: it’s not a business, or it’s not a university, or anything like that. Like, regardless of how they treat you, as long as they keep you out of trouble, keep you in class, they get their funding from the government, so they’re not rated on how well the administration really handles it….I’m glad to have this extra year, you know, ’cause that’s $10,000 extra I don’t have to spend to get that thing, because if I graduated high school with only Grade 12 I would never have been exposed to these different courses….Yeah, academically, if you do really poorly, you get a low self-esteem, I guess. If you do really well – like, it may push you to a different path ‘cause everyone needs to feel that sense of belonging, and that they’re good at something, and feel important. And school wise, if you do really poorly in school, you’ll be like, “ah, school sucks; I’m not going to school.” And they’ll skip school and go hang out with their friends, and it’ll push them that way. Likewise, if they do really well, and are rewarded well, they’ll choose that reward more over friends and parties and that more negative path. Like my girlfriend…she’s addicted to the praise.

…And socially, there’s a lot of relationships that happen, and people are a lot more liberal now, and it’s like with the media and TV shows, you sort of get the impression that, yes, every teenage boy and girl should have a girlfriend or boyfriend, and you should like, have your first kiss and all that. And, ah, like again, messing with your emotions, like you have to tie into how well you are doing in school. [pause] It’s kind of a strange thing most people [haven’t] considered, but, ah – well, also, say for example you’re a fat uncoordinated kid, who’s not very talented in much, you’d get teased a lot, I’d imagine by ah – that’s just an example [laugh] no one I know. Like myself, when I was younger, I got teased for being the only Chinese kid at this all white [elementary] school, and ah, that would have some affect on your self-esteem. So that when you went home you wouldn’t feel good about yourself. You wouldn’t do homework, you’d sort of mope around, watch TV [laugh], play video games, that sort of thing….I found [at intermediate school] I didn’t have any Oriental friends…maybe because I was embarrassed at being Oriental….I think it has stuck with me in a way, but I’m sort of aware enough to get over it…’cause I’ve got some Oriental friends now. [104M12]

From beginning to end, this young man reflects upon the influence of social pressures and expectations on the construction of self-identity, linking back and forth from the
context of education to the larger social arena. In the process, elements of the OD are both absorbed and contested. He identifies the rewards of high school success and poses an interesting view on why students might drop out – notably that overt expressions of resistance follow the failure to succeed. He entwines descriptions of going to school – getting an education – in a context of social risk with an idea of competition and game playing, which is fun if one is successful. Another student commented more explicitly on this:

There are a lot of people who are anti-establishment, who, like some of my friends and stuff [laugh] and I don't know, I'm kind of embarrassed to say I don't think about it that often. I do, but I've kind of accepted that – I know that I can't necessarily change – you can't really change what other people are going to – like you're in the game no matter what, you know. So, if you're going to be in the game like certain parts of your life you might as well play it right, you know what I mean? Just like go to school because you know other people will respect that, learn all the stuff. Like what I was saying before, it is empowering and then once you've gained everyone else's respect according to their, maybe rigid, guidelines, then you can break them and do what you want. But you can't, if you don't sort of appeal to them on their own level, and then do what you want, then they'll just write you off at the beginning and they'll say, “well, maybe she just can’t handle it, so she’s doing something else,” not that she can but she thinks it’s wrong – but that she can’t do it. [79F12].

In this student's view, education is part of the game of life. That being the case, learning how to play is the only real option. Resistance is futile because non-participation, no matter what the reasons, allows dismissal of that person. The only way to challenge the system is to first succeed within it.

To summarize, overall the students' response to the relentless educational discourse that surrounded them was to consider it. Sometimes the attempt to understand it was overwhelming (or perhaps the implications were just too unpleasant to accept) and a form of rejection by ignorance or denial was the chosen response. More

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284 It is worth noting that this is the young woman who earlier commented on life being handed out in pre-arranged chunks. If only I had her degree of insight before I dropped out of high school!

285 Given the relentless, government, media, and teacher discourses around the reform initiatives, and subsequent chaotic reform outcomes, it is difficult to see student claims of ignorance as
often, students attempt to negotiate elements of the OD in relation to their personal experiences and preferences. Where what they know supports accepting elements of the official rhetoric they generally choose to ‘play the game.’ If contradictions with personal knowledge occur and are recognized, students generate rational critiques. Concerning the reform discourse, grounds for critique (as can be seen in the debate quotes cited earlier) were often based on the impracticality, inaccuracy, and detrimental outcomes of the reform proposals. The kind of engagement with the structure of education revealed by participants in this study, is far removed from previous portrayals of students. There are few rebellious resisters with a cultural cause (and even they are intent on 'staying in, not dropping out). There is no passive, unthinking, quietly accepting majority. Participation in school may be forced, but whether they like it or not, these prisoners see benefit in successfully completing their sentence. So, in this complicated game of education for life, where can 'resistance' be found, and what does it look like?

**Looking for 'Resistance': “They Always Talk About it, But…”**

Previous sociology of education theory and research has essentially presented two kinds of resistance: that of the cultural rebel and school drop out, typified by Willis (1977); and the more prisoner-like struggle for control over time and space illustrated in Everhart (1983) and McLaren (1993). More recent work on school dropouts (Kelly & Gaskell, 1996; Tanner et al, 1995) has already moved toward a view similar to that expressed by student 104M12 (quoted earlier): dropping out has more to do with disconnection than rebellion - failure to establish peer support and academic success are key factors. There are also some other important reasons why overt acts of

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entirely genuine, especially as some students claiming no knowledge of reform issues had so much to say about high school education in general!
resistance may have a lesser presence in this study than in previous research: 1) this study did not go looking for resistance to school, but for the students’ experiences of the educational process; 2) the research gaze was on the majority of students who successfully gain a high school diploma, rather than a few of those who do not; 3) as noted in Chapter One, the peak of school disconnection occurs before students reach the age of 16 and most previous work on student resistance has looked at students under this age whereas this study includes those under and over sixteen; 4) the data from this study suggest that with the transition to high school, students begin to see many of the note-passing, chair scraping acts (described by Everhart and McLaren) as childish.

As already discussed in regard to collective action, students claimed that organized resistance (e.g., a walk out) was hard to organize and doomed to failure. Nevertheless, I observed that high school students are just as capable as younger ones of taking over the classroom of a teacher they do not respect. Senior students who commented on this kind of behaviour seemed somewhat shocked at the spontaneous mob mentality of it, however. Students in the observation site focus groups talked about this at some length. They explained that they disliked classes to become out of control, because it interfered with their learning (and thus, their chances of success in the educational game). But, when a teacher failed to teach them and treated them without respect, the students resorted to prisoner-like rebellion to express their frustration and mutual disrespect. In other words, these situations occurred when students felt they had nothing to loose by such behaviour.

Occasionally, a student did recount an instance of overt in-class rebellion or resistance similar to those described by Everhart (1983):

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286 Also, although I have little evidence to suggest it was a significant factor, I cannot rule out this possibility that those students who felt most disconnected at school were not in class on the day
See, well in English class, we’d talk about a certain – we were talking about, like puns or something - some kind of joke that’s called a pun. And everyone in the class started making fun of it and then I would say some joke, I can’t remember what, it was like a week ago, We’d just say like jokes, but some of them go like too far or something. I didn’t say one that was too far, but a lot of the students were like making fun of the teacher’s puns. So the teacher got kind of mad about that [111M9]

Additionally, struggles over school space were quite common, especially if student use of a space was restricted. Contested space could become a real problem to control and require the school administration to devote staff to constant ‘policing’ duties. At one school, freedom to gather in the foyer was a major issue that continued for several years. It began when an adult visiting the school at lunchtime complained that she found the crowd of students in the foyer intimidating.287 Parents on The School Council were sympathetic to the students’ position and it was addressed in the Council organized student focus groups. The students were willing to negotiate if they could have an alternative space to gather, but the administration was not open to this solution.288

Questions arise here about what is to be considered resistance. Most previous theorists would regard consistent, deliberate violation of specific rules regarding the use of space as resistance: but what of the more sophisticated attempt to form alliances and negotiate for change? This is neither rebellious resistance nor organized collective protest as it has previously been constructed, but it certainly is an attempt to exercise agency and achieve change.

Another area of resistance identified by Everhart was skipping, by both illegal and legal means. Probably most students skip classes illegally from time to time. In the of the survey, or chose not to participate by ‘failing’ to remember consent forms.

287 This occurred at the observation site. Personally, as a small woman entering many schools I found the complaint absurd.

288 At the other research site use of the foyer varied. At Site One it was strictly controlled, but the students were allowed to gather in the cafeteria, play music and exhibit artwork there. At Site Three student use of the large daylight lit foyer was encouraged. Site Two did not have a large foyer and Site Four seemed relaxed about students gathering there, but as far as I am aware, did not have a specific policy about it.
interviews, students believed that academically and behaviourally marginal students did this a lot, and this may well be true. When illegal skipping occurs, it is an act of resistance to the structurally determined, imposed daily routine, but for most students this kind of skipping was self-monitored and did not result in academic harm. Based on what I know from the collaborators and my own knowledge of university class skipping, it is possible that many students even calculate when skipping will be more advantageous than harmful. For example, getting help from peers with homework in a subject they find harder than the skipped class; strengthening friendship bonds with peers whose social/academic support they need in the attempt to 'stay in' successfully.

Everhart also identifies legal skipping (engaging in school-endorsed activities that get the student out of regular class attendance) as a resistant act because students told him that such activities provided more time with friends and a break from routine school work. He did note that these activities often involved more work than the skipped class. I would contest the categorization of this kind of skipping as resistance. Instead, I would argue that it is a highly important component of structural engagement and negotiation. It is my observation that the students taking part are usually quite successful academically and have to make up for the class work that is missed. Furthermore, although some class time is avoided, these activities (sports, drama, choir, peer helper, etc) generally involve significant additional time out of school hours. Participating students are investing in the educational stakes rather than resisting. They gain teacher mentors, strong bonds with like-minded peers, and self esteem via their achievements in the activity. All of these things can be considered as educational capital that assists staying in and completing high school successfully.

Similarly, in contrast to the view taken by other researchers, most of the acts that I would identify as resistance against the constraining elements of the educational structure are primarily aimed at staying in and successfully completing high school
and/or obtaining future aspirations. For example, a student may take an advanced class needed for a future goal even if advised by a teacher that it will be too hard. Obtaining a transfer to a class with a better teacher, taking a class in summer school to re-try a failed course or obtain better teaching are other examples. Choosing to counter peer pressure is another important form of resistance. To attempt a class that friends scorn carries a double risk: the student may be dropped by those friends and fail to make new ones. Without peer support in a class to help with understanding material the risk of educational failure also increases.  

I would also identify as a form of resistance action choices, including articulating opinions, that are counter to the social expectations conveyed in the OD and/or endorsed by social mores. My earlier discussion on reflections of the official discourse has already presented examples of this kind of contesting of dominant views. If the OD is considered to be a form of structural constraint, then should not a clear challenge to its validity be recognized as structural resistance? As far as I am aware this has not, however, been contemplated as a form of resistance in the sociology of education literature. The potential role of denial as resistance raises further questions. Theoretical arguments that considered such a possibility would likely focus on the degree of consciousness involved in the denial act and as the earlier quotes demonstrate, that is probably variable. If denial is articulated as a deliberate action choice (as in the case of 245F12), I personally think it is a resistant act. The problem remains of how to interpret the non-elaborated denial statements. Solving this requires additional research beyond this dissertation, but the question I would raise for consideration is: if dominant 

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289 Various quotes included in this chapter and the preceding one illustrate these points. Attention is particularly directed to the excerpts from 168F9 and 186M9, later in this chapter.
290 I draw here on some of the discussion in Chapter One concerning Giddens (1996) on purposive conduct and the five issues in structure-agency relatedness.
discourses are as prevalent and powerful as theorists have argued, then can one actually deny their imperatives without consciously reflecting upon them?

Based on these deliberations about resistance, I suggest that the prevailing sociological concept of resistance is thin and weak. As I contended in Chapter One, and have already argued further, concepts about resistance should not be conflated with those concerning acts of agency. Furthermore, agency and resistance acts cannot automatically be assumed to exist only when structural imperatives are challenged or rejected. If being a successful social agent entails getting an education, then the context of schooling is one of risk that must be successfully navigated in order to maximize social agency throughout life. In the students' discussions, elements of resistance are entwined with struggles to succeed, and any resistant act is carefully weighed - likely cost versus likely benefit. Insightful agent 79F12 amplifies some of these considerations:

Like, I don’t want to go off to university in some obscure town somewhere that no one else is going to because I’ll feel like – even if it’s not true -- I’ll feel like I’m not doing the right thing, because if I’m doing the right thing, why is everybody else doing something else? ....The thing is...kids always talk about how they...want to do their own thing and they don’t want to do - to succumb to the pressure to go to university, and like its so oppressive [laugh] you know. And they always talk about it, but they always end up going. So, if I were to go, I wouldn’t feel like I was being forced to do it, I don’t think. But to a certain extent, like I know that my grandparents would not agree with my not going to university, but I don’t really care what they think. Whoever I care about, well it’s important. …

Personally, what I’m afraid of is, I’m not well read or anything. Like I think I want university – the kind of course to open up that part of my life...and I think that if I just went to college for animation, that I would still be, I’d just be – I don’t want to be seen as stupid. Which, like I know I’m not stupid, but it’s true that I do care what other people think – just don’t wanna have that against me. Like I may not judge other people by what they’ve read, but I know that other people may judge me. I wanna just have as many doors open as possible, you know what I mean?

...If you’re not well respected kind of thing, then saying I’m doing this because I want to – other people might think you’re doing it ‘cause you have no other options. But if you are well educated and respected, then whatever you do, you don’t have to justify it any other way. Like people won’t see it as you falling back on something. They’ll say, ‘OK, this person has had all these options but she’s chosen to do that,’ – not like she’s lazy so she did this, or she’s not smart enough so she had to do that, you know? So I guess I do care what people think – but this is like people in general, not just my parents and friends. Actually less my parents because I already know they know me, and not my friends because I
already know that they know. So other people, just like the world you know? Employers, and people you run into, and friends of friends – stuff like that... Well, I think it affects everybody. I mean, even if it doesn't affect me personally, it affects everybody else, which would affect me. Just like when I was saying that, you know, that people's measure of your intelligence depends on this and this and this. The media feeds them that information I'm sure – I don't know if I'm sure about anything, but I'm pretty sure – you know, it doesn't come from nowhere. It probably stems from the media, I would think. Um [pause] and then just statistics and stuff like that. Like the unemployment rate, and not being able to get jobs if you haven't been to college and you know, all that sort of thing.

As this young woman said earlier, "if you're gonna be in the game, you might as well play, right?" And so, in that context, what does resistance look like? One study cannot possibly have the answers to such complex theoretical questions. I do, however, proffer that resistance will look different across distinct times and spaces. Consider for the moment the social conditions in Britain that are the larger context for the action choices of Willis' 'lads.' Sharply class divided, but until the mid 1970's, economically booming, post war Britain offered lucrative labour positions that did not require high school completion. Perhaps, with options available, the lads, and I (even if we were academically able students), could choose to resist by rejecting the middle class educational culture and dropping out of school. Students in 21st century Canadian high school do not have such options. They know what kind of jobs are available without a high school diploma - they are already doing them! Much-publicized evidence indicates that education really is the road to social success. In this context, why would a student actually choose to drop out and be considered a total social failure if that can possibly be avoided? Within this set of options the role of resistance is altered and the

291 I have already argued in Chapter One that Willis looks upon the choices of the lads with a middle class gaze that discounts the value of certain kinds of work.

292 In fact, if they are not still in high school and do not have their diploma, they are less likely to be considered for even those jobs, and they know this to be so. Respondents to the OCDSB Graduate Survey (2003) who had not enrolled in Post-secondary education reported working mainly in a restaurant, sales position, or construction/maintenance, with males more often employed in restaurants and construction and women in sales. As far as I can assess informally, current conditions in Britain are similar.
form that it takes is adapted to the available alternatives and likely outcomes. The main purpose of employing resistant acts might remain the promotion of personal agency, but the paths to achieving the latter may differ across time and place. When the primary path is educational success, choosing if, what, and how to resist is just one small part of employing a set of navigation tools that allow the student agent to negotiate better outcomes within a shifting social context of risk.

**The Negotiating Agent: Navigating Structure in a Context of Social Risk**

In Chapters One and Two, I discussed how research literature and educational policy viewed students through an unwavering lens of social risk. This lens constantly positions students as incomplete, vulnerable, incompetent, in danger and potentially dangerous, and therefore, not capable to act in their own best interests. As illustrated in Chapter Two, the OD tends to focus on individual elements of risk that will result from educational failure (youth deviance, poverty, unemployment, poor parenting, etc.). As well, commentary concerning risks from sexism, racism, bullying, and the like, is often incorporated into educational policy texts. Beyond this, there is also a dominant discourse concerning the larger context of social and economic risk (unemployment, family breakdown, international and local violence, other life threatening events) about which the mass media provide a constant (and many argue, exaggerated) backdrop, and much of which feeds and supports the OD. Dominant discourses are effective when they resonate sufficiently with what people actually experience, and during the period that I was in the schools collecting the data for this study, the elements of risk connected to societal violence had a particularly immediate presence for the participants. On the international front, coverage of the war in Kosovo echoed the actual experience of some students who had fled similar situations, sometimes spending periods of time in refugee
camps. A mass murder of Ottawa transport workers, just as school finished one day, was quickly followed by the fatal shootings in schools in Littleton, Colorado and Tabor, Alberta.\textsuperscript{293}

Given such a background, it would be extraordinary to find that students' discourse did not contain a sense of getting an education within a context of social risk. Danger of social exclusion via educational failure is the core risk promoted by the OD, and indeed students' discussions were saturated with this concern.\textsuperscript{294} Students also volunteered discussion about other risk elements incorporated (with varying emphasis) into the OD. These are listed in Table Ten, along with the percentage of students that mentioned them.

Students did not, however, merely provide a mirror image reflection of the OD rhetoric on 'at risk youth.' In the students' discourses, the risk factors are presented as contextual obstacles that must be negotiated in order to stay in school successfully and thus avoid the ultimate fear – social exclusion. For the adolescent, high school is a major social arena - microcosm of the larger social world. Within this cultural context, students act to mediate the multiple risks that surround them.

\textsuperscript{293} Because of the sensational nature of these events I have found it difficult to know how to include them without 'buying in' to media sensationalism about the unusual. However, the events, all occurring during April 1999 took an emotional toll on students, parents, teachers and researcher alike and I do not want to ignore this. There is much I might say about it, but I will note here only that five high schools and at least eight elementary schools are located between 1/2 to 2 miles from the site of the OC Transpo depot where the first of the three mass murders occurred. Thousands of Ottawa students were in the process of boarding OCT buses at the time of this shooting. Agents # 3 and # 4 were walking from school to their workplace, 1/4 mile from the incident, and heard the shots. Societal violence was the larger social risk magnified at the time of data collection, but two years later, the Ottawa high tech industry collapsed. This event underlines the unemployment risk, but contradicts the OD obsession with MST education for economic success. It would be very interesting to know what kind of effect that had on students' thinking about their educational and career futures.

\textsuperscript{294} The questionnaire item asking about student's concerns mirrored some of the OD risk elements connected with educational failure. Those results have been reported in Chapter Four (see Table Two), and many of the quotes already cited provide examples of related interview comments.
TABLE TEN: Student-Identified Risk Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDENT-IDENTIFIED RISK ELEMENT</th>
<th>N =58 %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer risk (negative peer pressure, harassment)</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unequal treatment (due to ethnicity, religion, sex, age)</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social isolation (fear of no friends, no support, not fitting in)</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School personnel risk (abusive practices, low expectations, low quality)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-risk (lack of ability, maturity, dangerous choices, insufficient information)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global dangers</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health-threatening stress (physical or mental illness caused by school-related stress)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapons in school</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family risk (lack of support, low status, abuse)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dropping out is an indicator that the student has failed to manage high school and will likely therefore also fail at life – a risk that students generally do not embrace as cool and rebellious, although studies may find bravado, among those who are on the verge of falling out of the game. Dechman (2003) contends that social exclusion is a “predisposed, pervasive, prolonged process” in which “early school leaving is one of the most reliable indicators that a process…has been set in motion” (p.7).

During their interviews, students described a variety of strategies to mediate the risks they identify, which fall into two broad, co-existing and interrelated, but not always complementary groups: educational and social. Students bring to school differing amounts of pre-acquired educational and social capital tied to the social circumstances

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295 Table Ten reports figures related to personal experience as opposed to merely knowing that a risk existed. 100% of the student's interviews contained notions of risk either directly experienced or observed, or noted as potential risks. The Thematic Coding Guide, provided in Appendix D, uses additional categories.

296 As I noted earlier, recent literature on school dropouts has moved strongly towards this point of view. Dechman's article is part of a special edition of the Canadian Council on Social
of their family network. Most of the time, greater external capital works to improve the students’ chances of educational and social success within the school, but not always. For in-school success on both fronts, the capital available to the student must include knowledge about how to negotiate social contexts. In order to successfully negotiate school politics students need to find a ‘safe’ peer group that serves to protect from becoming a target of bullying, ridicule or gossip (26%). Although having friends (any friends) is vital to school social survival, for educational success the ‘safe’ peer group must include friends with expectations and educational capital to share (especially if the student has a personal deficit). A Grade 9 student from a transient low income family (quoted in Chapter Four), was facing his tenth school move in his process of getting an education. He was adept at maintaining friendship networks, but indicates in the following comment his awareness that the purely social is not enough:

R: Mmm. [pause] At least you have some friends there already.
S: Oh yeah. Well, I knew them before. A couple of my friends I met when I moved to Ottawa for the first time. Yeah, the first time I lived there for three years and I met some friends, and now they’ve met friends after I’ve been moved, and now I’m friends with their friends, so I’ve got a few friends out there. But, you know, skateboard – that’s all we do. [111M9]

A primary concern for students then, is to effectively reduce overall risk by creating and maintaining a balance between competing risk factors. Students must maintain both friends and grades (36%).

Students employ available educational and social capital to maximize their option. They use their available social capital – the resources of family, friends, family members of friends – to increase their chances of educational success (53%).

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Development magazine *Perception* 26(1&2), 2003, focusing on the role of social capital in the process of social exclusion.

In the following discussion the percentage of students (N=58) that specifically described this kind of risk mediation tactic is shown in brackets after I introduce the discussion of that factor. Some form of risk mediation was described by 94% of the participants.

A number of the quotes in Chapter 4, as well as those cited at within this chapter, contain passages that illustrate these points.
Conversely, students with high educational capital invest this to reduce present and future social risk (31%). In the simplest form this means working hard in school to make the educational capital pay off, but for students who are academically successful but less socially gregarious, academic help can be traded for friendship (or at least peer protection).

The use of adults in risk mediation is interesting. That students constantly look to adults for support and assistance with educational attainment has already been demonstrated. When it comes to the mediation of social risk, however, students often perceive adults to not understand, and not be willing to listen or accept, the current conditions of the social world in which adolescents experience school and gain their formal and social educations. Nevertheless, parents who are aware of the social challenges can be a powerful source of strength and support to students experiencing high social risk as this student contending with racial/religious prejudice attests:

S: Well basically, the whole reason I came to this country was to get an education ‘cause where I’m from, there are schools, but it wasn’t much. It wasn’t much help because of the war and stuff that was going on at the time. And then basically when we came down here we went right away to school – with no English… Well, I’d say the bad part [of] going through my high school or public school was the language…. The hardest thing I ever experienced was…my first and second year in Grade 7 and 8…..Basically, like kids would make fun of us, the way we were talking, say some bad languages, things like that. Stuff about us that we didn’t understand. There were times when they would just use regular bad words – four letter words. But when it comes to racial words – the N word - or telling you to go back where you came from, I couldn’t tell you if they really meant what they were saying or saying it to us from anger. I wouldn’t even know why they were saying that if I didn’t do anything to them. If I did something out of line and was in the wrong position then I could understand if they say something back…. You know in my religion, I’m Muslim – we have to pray five times a day. Some of us do follow the religion, some don’t. To those who follow, every time a prayer time comes they ask the teacher if they can be excused for that time, and take 5-10 minutes to go pray. Some teachers do understand and they let you go; some teachers are like, "I only have one hour for my class time, so do my work and do whatever after." So at that point if the teacher tells me that, I think that that’s related to my religion. [pause] But also from the kids’ side, once a teacher does that to you, some kids take that the wrong way and blame every teacher, so that’s a problem too. You can’t take what one teacher did and blame everyone…. R: Yeah, well, what is it that’s there for you that lets you keep your confidence? S: I think its just experience that I went through previously – in my Grade 7 and 8
period my dad always told me people would always [be] all kinds of racist and prejudice, call you awful names. And he just told me to ignore it. And that’s the best way. That’s what my Dad told me and that’s what I followed. If someone does something wrong, you don’t do something wrong to correct that. [72M12] 299

On other occasions, students are the instruments of mediation that serve to gain the involvement of responsible caring adults:

Some friends I know, it was suicide. A lot of students they consider it and they want to talk to somebody, but feel afraid to go to adults….If we go to our friends they can help us – not really without judging – but without immediately freaking out….I think it was better my friend came to me and told me about it, than if she’d gone to her parents. It’s important that I’d known she was a little bit depressed, that she was going through problems, and I think that her parents weren’t really aware of her depression and upsetness. And it worked out fine and I actually talked her into talking to her parents. So, sometimes it’s the friends that just get you the right idea that your parents are not there to judge you and are not going to send you to a mental hospital. They’re just there to see you’re OK. [112F9] 300

Such pressing social risks as those described above, must be managed successfully before a student has energy to devote to educational success. A student who lacks either a peer or adult support network is clearly at a negotiation disadvantage. There is considerable research, including many Statistics Canada studies, that indicate that children from low SES families tend to do less well in school and are more prone to public ‘trouble.’ It is this established social trend that drives the OD content that positions parents living in poverty as ‘poor’ parents. The assumption is that being economically disadvantaged automatically translates into a parent who is non-supportive of their child’s formal education. I have already argued in Chapter Four that data from this study refute that assumption. Also challenged is the OD assertion that youthful

299 This very calm and rational consideration of racial and religious prejudice should not be confused with passive acceptance of such treatment. 72M12 is the young man who made the statement about school as a jail. He had a reputation in the school for being outspoken and confrontational about matters he perceived as unjust.

300 Again, I face the problem of not wishing to support OD constructions by emphasizing the existence of adolescents with problems. I do not think we are in a position to accurately measure whether or not incidence of adolescent depression and suicide has increased in recent years (for all of the kinds of reasons commonly cited in connection with Durkheim’s theories on suicide). Nevertheless, these are real issues that adolescents confront. After one school workshop I attended that dealt with these matters, about a quarter of the students present indicated to the
peers are an inevitable ‘bad’ influence, tempting others out of school and into deviance. In this study, peer networks play a role in compensating for a lack of familial educational and/or social capital that is actually more likely to support a student's successful high school completion than the reverse. The process of education can mediate or exacerbate the process of social exclusion. Some students have a strong sense of these potentials, but I do not think any of us understand at all well how this works: 301

I guess the [teachers] attitude in high school is, "well it's pretty much too late to change it because they are kind of old enough to think on their own so we can't really tell them what to do." And I just think they should maybe stress values more in the earlier part of high school because I think you can still catch them. I think there is still a chance to like fix someone up when they are in Grade 9 or 10, but I think after that it is pretty much up to the person, up to the individual to decide how it's going to be. [251M12]

If social risk is sufficiently under control and enough educational capital is available to allow the student to believe that individual hard work and persisting against all odds will lead to success, a student can contemplate engaging in additional structure-agency negotiations (or resistance). With a secure base of educational and social capital, students can risk pursuing their own educational goals without immediate peer support (e.g., taking a class with no friends in it). Similarly, a student may choose to pursue his/her own wishes rather than comply with a respected authority figure (i.e., taking an advanced class when a teacher or parent has suggested it will be too difficult). Students with confidence in their negotiating abilities will seek alternatives when principal that they needed urgent emotional help. What is important is that we learn to listen to adolescents and understand the way they experience and cope with challenges and problems.

301 This study explored a lot of ground and there are many issues here that need much more attention and research. Interactions between social and educational capital are not straightforward. The exchanges of different kinds of capital are variable and difficult to unravel. As some of the previous and following transcript excerpts illustrate, low-income families may lack educational capital, but still have and use social capital networks to assist their children in compensating. Less frequently, but crossing economic status boundaries, parents fail to provide social capital in the form of a supportive environment. When this occurs, children tend to also lack social skills and are impaired in efforts to create peer support. I have seen student peer groups attempt to help students in these kinds of situations, but their ability to do so is often limited, and attempts to do so can carry too high a risk (in all kinds of ways). The first two high school years
confronted with road blocks, such as: asking for course transfers or permission to take a credit at another school; re-taking courses at night/summer school; confronting school personnel about unfair practices.

Successful navigation of the educational structure and context of social risk is a complex and continuous task. The following two transcript excerpts help to illustrate what is involved in this process for students arriving in school with social support networks but limited educational capital. In the first excerpt, we meet a 15 year old male student from a single mother, immigrant family. His mother completed high school and works as a manager in the service sector. He wants to be an engineer and expects to go to university, but is already worried about affording the cost of that. He has no computer at home, reports doing about 12 hours of homework a week (well above the Grade 9 average), and has a B average. He describes how he seeks multiple sources of information, replacing his absent father with his big brother, and valuing his mother’s support and advice, but substituting for her lack of academic knowledge. Still, if friends can’t help him out, and teachers aren’t willing and available, he is at a disadvantage as he must rely on himself.\footnote{Both interviews involve Grade 9 students and have communication patterns typical of this age group. The researcher needs to provide more frequent encouragement to elaborate, than the senior students (on average) require. Therefore, the excerpts retain R’s input and provide good examples of how the recursive interview approach works.}

R– So you had a pretty clear idea beforehand, what you would get to choose in grade 10. How did you get that information, so that you knew?
S – I asked teachers about it. I had peers tell me about it. But I didn’t really listen to them as much as I listened to the teacher. My elders mostly too.
R – your elders?
S – Like my mother, my brother."
R – So, do you get a lot of help and advice? Do they influence you a lot – your family?
S – They influence me. Not that much anymore, but I don’t think I really need it all that much any more, but before in elementary, yeah. My brother, he really pushed me a lot because I don’t live with my father and my brother’s like a Big
Brother to me. So he influenced me very much. He told me what to do you know. It's not like he forced me into it. I was listening and I could accept it. 
R ....Just going back to your mother and brother, you said they were a big influence on you, but for school projects you marked 'not at all.” I wondered, you don’t ask your mom much about school projects?
S – not really [laugh]. My Mom, like we emigrated to Canada and my Mom she’s not very strong in English, so it’s mostly on my own, you know. My brother does, but he doesn’t live with me anymore, he moved out. And – yep, it’s only me on my own.
R – So, do you get other help when you need it, with school work or projects? From friends or something?
S – Yeah, from friends. I try. But I’m used to it that my Mom can’t really help me much. I didn’t really expect it. But she influenced me big time! ......she always tells me about my family. What we do and she tells me I’m her baby and stuff. She always tells me it’s good to get a job, you have to do something in life. And of course you know, when you’re a little kid you listen to your Mom and I always grew up with her telling me this stuff – it's good to be something in life. I mean life is not going to be easy....[186M9]

In the next excerpt S is a female Grade 9 student. She wants to finish high school and thinks she will probably go to college or university after taking a year off to work. Her mother finished high school but her father did not. Her first language is English, she has a computer at home but not Internet access. She reports a grade average of B and actually doing about four hours of homework a week (although she thinks ten hours are needed). At first, she is not really saying very much. She gives superficial reasons for not having clear future goals and might easily be dismissed as unthinking, but it becomes apparent that it is much more complex than that:

R You’re not sure yet about careers – have you got any ideas at all?
S: No [laughs]
R: No? No ideas what you might like?
S: I’m not sure yet what I should do. I don’t really want to decide yet.
R: Any reason you don’t want to decide yet?
S: Well, I guess I really don’t know much about a lot of jobs, so I don’t want to pick one and then realize in OAC or grade 12 that it’s not the one for me. So I want to take like time and think about which job I could take.
R: Mmm
S: Then there are not much jobs out there, I think
R: Why do you think that?
S: I don’t know. Cause I’m always seeing people looking for jobs and [pause, laugh]
R: Tell me more about that?
S: Well, my Dad doesn’t have a job, and so I’m like – I guess that’s what I mean. There’s a lot of people who need jobs out there and there’s a lot of people who
can’t get them. Like they have like degrees or whatever, but there’s not a job available. That’s kind of sad I guess.

R: Yeah. Do you know many people like that? As well as your Dad?
S: No, not a lot. My Dad, I think it’s about two years ago he lost it, I think [pause]
R: And he’s still looking?
S: Yeah. And he went to school to get some sort of degree or something and he got it but then he has to find a job that are looking for it – whatever he did.
R: You don’t know what he did, eh?
S: I think it’s something like a crane operator. So like he could work in Home Depot or some place like that [laugh, pause]
R: What about your Mom?
S: My Mom has two jobs. She works in the government and she’s a waitress for [name]. She hasn’t done that in a long time, she has to wait for jobs to come up…..

A little later in the interview, S reveals a process by which the school fails to compensate for a student’s lack of educational capital.

S: ...math, and some of the things they teach you, I don’t think you’re ever gonna learn because when I ask my Mom to help me or something, she doesn’t know it either. Some of the things they teach you ...it seems like you don’t really need it. It’s like they’re trying to waste the time [laugh] in class or whatever, R: What kind of things?
S: Well, [laugh] I guess you could use what we’re doing in Math right now – Integers. I mean I know you need Integers and stuff, but they have a whole little section of it and like they have really, really long questions and my Mom didn’t even understand it, and you have to change everything and it’s very complicated. My Mom was like “ I don’t know what you’re doing.” So, some of the things like that...I don’t like math [laugh]....I think of math as being useful.....I’ve gone grocery shopping, things like that, and I know all that stuff. But some of the things they teach me, I don’t even understand where would you see these kind of things, or use these kind of, ah, questions...
R: ....Tell me more about this [amount of homework]. This is something that you obviously found frustrating.
S: Well, at the end, with like five minutes left, the teacher will like hand out a sheet and we have to complete it for tomorrow. Sometimes it’ll be something we’ve been working on in the class, but sometimes it’ll be something you wouldn’t know what to do on it, so you have to bring it home and you have to try to figure it out and ask your parents or whatever, just because the teacher wouldn’t explain it. And if you don’t understand it you just leave it blank to ask the teacher the next morning, but then you lose marks because she thinks you’re too lazy to do it. And so I don’t think it’s really fair that we have to suffer in our marks....
R: [You said] six hours a day here and then two hours homework?
S: Yeah, ‘cause we have to eat, and people have extra activities after school, or babysitting, or people have part-time jobs in high school and stuff. So I don’t really think that it’s fair that we are here six hours...[and] we should have a lot of homework like we do. Like maybe just stuff that we hadn’t finished in class because we were talking, or something, but they like assign extra work..... If I’m really, really, busy then I’ll do like, I’ll skim through most of it. I’ll do most of the
questions, but some of them I'll just leave blank. But if I've nothing really else to do, then I'll do it all. But if I was out with my friends I just won't do it – like I'll do most of it but I just won't do it all. If I leave it all blank then it looks like I'm just lazy, but if I do some of it, it looks like I tried....I always tell my parents how dumb I think it is that we have to go to school for the whole day, and everyone has to do it 'cause it's the law or whatever, but then you have like a lot of homework. 

R: What do they say?

S: ....They say like, “oh well, that's school – we had to do that too. You'll get through it eventually.” But I'm getting sick of homework now. Sometimes, at the beginning of the semester you wanna like try good, like I'm gonna do all my homework and do everything the teacher says and get a really good mark. But then, now, there's a lot of homework 'cause I have math, science and history this semester – they're like the only hard subjects and I have them altogether, so I get a lot of homework. So most of it I just sort of leave [laugh] and I don't do it [pause]

R: Does that get to be a problem later on?

S: Well the teacher – ah, obviously you lose marks for not doing it, but it doesn't really matter I guess, 'cause if I do good when I'm in class and I participate I guess it'll sort of make up for not doing it. But, I mean, you should do your homework, obviously. But sometimes, some things that I don't understand, I'll just be so frustrated, I'll be like “I'm not doing it,” and I just won't do it.

R: But I guess what I wanted to find out is, if you don't do your homework, can you like catch up in class, or does it make a difference when it comes to tests?

S: Well, like in math class they usually give you homework and I won't finish it, but next day she gives you the first 20 minutes of class to finish and catch up. So I guess that's sort of a good thing too, and I think that's what they should have actually, that if you get homework, the next day you should get at least 10-15 minutes if you missed a couple of questions, to have time during class. 'Cause I work a lot better in a classroom when I see everyone else is working, but when I'm at home and I'm doing it, I don't really feel like doing it. [168F9]

As the young man in the first example said, “life isn’t going to be easy,” and this young woman sees a tough social world where the lived reality of her father’s continued unemployment after re-training seems at odds with the middle-class message about education. Like her male counterpart, she is short of educational capital – her parents encourage her to stick it out and get through it, but they can’t give her the practical help she needs with homework. Unable to adequately compensate she tends to adopt a defensive and rejecting attitude, knowing the school community will perceive it as mere laziness. In fact, she tries to compensate in class when a teacher is available to help her. She can clearly articulate what she needs in this regard, but not all of the teachers provide it. Instead of ensuring she gets the supportive academic help she needs to
succeed, the school is in danger of failing this young woman by assuming her lazy and her parents disinterested in education. \(^{303}\)

Understanding the complexities of high school students’ structure-agency negotiations and understanding the role social and educational capital play within them is, I contend, essential to bringing about any real and constructive improvement in their educational outcomes. Student culture incorporates the larger social world with its associated risks, but as Tesson et al (1988,1990) argue, adolescents experience these from a different social location that demands a construction of particular interaction rules. Within that, life experience varies individually, just as it does for adults. The way that the students in this study respond to their placement in the social context disputes the way they are constructed in the adult, dominant social discourses about youth and risk. How they talk about and negotiate the structural constraints/risks they encounter differs from the portraits provided by sociology of education theorists. When these special agents point the spotlight on their own actions they reveal a very complicated game of education for life.\(^{304}\)

**Theoretical Implications: “It’s Kinda Hard to Explain”**

I believe the results from this study have some important theoretical implications. Primarily, given the opportunity to reflect on their own actions, the students offer some strong challenges to the assumptions incorporated into previous theories concerning structure agency relations. As I have argued above, from these data emerge a different

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\(^{303}\) I was able to contact 168F9 in May 2003. She had graduated from Grade 12 and was taking a year off, working part-time while she still tried to decide what to do in the future. She planned to go to college but could not afford to make a mistake in choosing a program. In fact, only illness prevented her from joining the other students who assisted me in presenting some of the study results that month. I was not able to contact 166M9.

\(^{304}\) Carleton University adopted the double entendre of this phrase as its slogan. It represents the dual OD messages that success (survival even) in life requires education, and that acquiring sufficient education will be a life-long enterprise.
kind of social agent - one who engages with educational structure, employing negotiation strategies and tactics more often than resorting to rebellious acts. This challenge to traditional conceptualizations of resistance is one that potentially extends to theories concerning any institutional setting.\textsuperscript{305}

Expressions of agency also appear differently through the students' self-focused lens. Neither passive and unthinking, nor thoughtlessly (dangerously) rebellious, the child-student is perhaps better constructed as a student-agent looking to elder agents for wise counsel and practical support. Very social and startlingly reflective, these students do everything possible to develop and preserve personal agency in a world portrayed to them as dangerously risky - in and out of school. Consciousness of possible risks they may face, but holding an accurate perception of how the adult world views youth, these agents may sometimes opt to be subversive, concealing their own agency because "with the lights out it's less dangerous."\textsuperscript{306}

Another related challenge is the one the students pose for conceptualizations of collective agency and collective action for change. I have suggested that students engage in collective interactions - the forming of shifting networks and alliances that can improve the individual's position in the educational stakes. While this may sometimes lead to associations that bring about change for the collectivity of students, it seems to be at odds with the notion of uniting through collective consciousness. As noted earlier, social movement theory, and community development theory (such as Chambers, 1997) does engage with issues of constant power dynamics and shifting alliances, but these

\textsuperscript{305} The Discussion of results in this Chapter also has relevance for all kinds of practice and program development aimed at adolescents.

\textsuperscript{306} In keeping with the comments of 112F9, this quote is from the celebrated teen anthem from Nirvana, "Smells Like Teen Spirit" written by Kirk Cobain (1991). Some of the lyrics are: with the lights out it's less dangerous, here we are, now entertain us. I feel stupid and contagious… I found it hard, it's hard to find, oh well, whatever, nevermind….Hello, hello, hello… A denial
theoretical insights do not seem to have been fully absorbed into notions of collective agency for social action within socially subordinated groups.

Sociological theory, in all areas, also continues to struggle to understand and explain the complexities of structure-agency relations, especially that characteristics of organizational structures may be simultaneously constraining and enabling. In this regard, although it may be "kinda hard to explain," I am struck by the ease with which students in this study appear to incorporate these contradictions into their negotiation tactics.307

I was surprised by the imagery of game playing contained within some of the students' discussions, but upon reflection decided that I probably should not have been. These adolescents have grown up with electronic interactive games as an unquestioned form of entertainment, and popular media has widely promoted the image of the shifting, but constantly reconstructing matrix. Earlier I argued that the changing social context (e.g., the actual economic options available to the school leaver) will influence the form that resistance takes. I think that there is also a social feedback loop involved in this process whereby social conditions are reflected in developing social theories, which in turn filter into government discourses and popular media. For example, the popular Matrix imagery derives from the post-modern notion of endless subjectivities but no actual reality. It should perhaps therefore be expected that the characteristics of structure, as well as strategies to resist it, will look different across time and space. Thus, although the individual school might still operate and be experienced as prison-like, the structures of education are perceived as part of the matrix of life - a game of chance, risk and negotiation - a notion that, intentionally or accidentally, is promoted by the content of the OD.
During the pilot stage of this study, Agent #3 made a comment (cited in Chapter One) about school, knowledge and power. During the writing of this chapter, I asked him on several separate occasions to comment on the thoughts I offer about structure, agency and resistance. During one of these conversations, he told me that as he and Agent #4 had entered university and taken some sociology and economics courses, they had often discussed these matters. His comments echo some of the concerns I raised in Chapter One about theories (such as Giddens’ “structuration”) that dissolve the presence of structure but do not adequately address how its presence is experienced in everyday life by less powerful individuals:

All of the institutions we create form a superstructure – an entity that takes on a mind of its own and doesn’t treat its human components in a humane way. Sometimes it is quite brutal. Seemingly self aware, it will project itself for system self-preservation, sometimes to horrific levels. Resistance per se is futile [pause] but perhaps it will be rewarded in heaven [laugh].

Subsequently, I asked Agent #3 to specifically consider my comments on the matrix game images conjured by 104M12 and 79F12 (see discussion on resistance above). He responded that he liked the comments but personally found it difficult to simultaneously consider both the immediate conditions of the school structure and those of the larger structure of education as a social institution. As getting good grades in school had not required much effort on his part, he had viewed high school not as a prison but more as

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307 Perhaps the crisis nature of the official discourse content surrounding these students inevitably promotes this kind of insight and ends up pointing the way for the tactics of response and resistance?

308 I also ran into Agent #4 one day when he was in his second university year. He quite excitedly told me that he “got all those theories and stuff” I was researching and writing about now that he was taking economics courses, “and it's awesome!”

309 Goffman’s (1961) observation concerning the individual also seems a potentially important strand of insight here. He positions the "prisoner-agent" as a "stance taking entity" who takes "a position somewhere between identification with an organizations and opposition to it" shifting involvement in order to gain or maintain situational balance (p.320). This seems relevant to the negotiating student-agent, although my impression of the study participants was that they were generally more hopeful of successful outcomes and future change, more in keeping with the way Chambers (1993) portrays actors as simultaneously challenging and colluding with the system in order to eventually attain constructive changes.
a social ground - a game that was fun. Considering the position taken by 79F12 that change could only come if one first learned to play the game by the institutional rules, he questioned how it would be possible to resist effectively if the institutional habits had been adopted. He argued that radical systemic change could not be brought about by one or two people, but only if the "whole tribe rebelled." And so by a series of ellipses, the discussion returns to the conundrum of collective action.

Agency-structure relations are the core of sociological inquiry; from the social constructionist perspective, no definitive theoretical answers can ever be found because the construction and experience of those relations is dynamic. The question driving this dissertation asked how high school students in a particular place and time experienced and explained the intersection of their agency with educational structure. In telling their own story of the action, the participants shine a light on some interesting threads of theory for further consideration as part of the social constructionist web.

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310 Comments during a telephone conversation with Agent #3 in which I specifically sought feedback, November 2003.
311 He also said at one point that "stacking new institutions on top of old and cracking ones is just adding to the chaos," He cited as an example "Homeland Security" initiatives.
CONCLUSIONS

"And That's the Difference"\textsuperscript{312}

The core of purpose of my dissertation research has been to directly ask students entering and exiting high school their thoughts and experiences about that part in the process society terms "getting an education." My reason for doing so has been to challenge the assumptions of prior research and educational policy that routinely portray students as incomplete and incompetent social agents with inferior ability to reason and act rationally. The details of my supporting arguments are laid out in the first half of this dissertation, but one study participant provides the most succinct and compelling summary:

Students have a voice. We should have a say, but we don't get it. People see us as little bitty children, still crawling - we don't know what we are talking about. But we do know what we're talking about - we're usually the ones that know best as opposed to the Board....Even if we were heard, we wouldn't actually be listened to - and that's the difference - they hear us, but they're not listening. [49M12]

Applying a social constructionist epistemology I attempted to design a methodology that would allow an answer to the question posed by Fullan (1991), "what might happen if we treated the student as someone whose opinion mattered" (p.170)? My intent was to create a space within the confines of the closed institution of the school that allowed the students to have a say and to be listened to. Not just heard, as they so often are as merely noisy, inevitably immature and not worth taking seriously;\textsuperscript{313} but instead listened to as people with the lived experience to actually know something valuable about educational issues.

The study results confirmed what the glimmers of evidence presented in Chapter One suggested: there are grounds for a different interpretation of adolescent social

\textsuperscript{312} Part of a quotation from 49M12, cited later in the Conclusion.
\textsuperscript{313} See Chapter Two for the discussion of how such descriptors are applied to adolescents.
agency. Given the opportunity, students are active, information-seeking social agents who work to unravel and negotiate a complex, sometimes enabling, often constraining social world. They can and will, engage in constructive dialogue about their educational experiences, choices and aspirations, and what they have to say has substance worthy of a policy response. I therefore reiterate, the most important recommendation for action I can make is that parents, educators, politicians and policy-makers provide opportunities for constructive dialogue and then actually listen with open minds prepared to learn from what students can tell us.

In the rest of this conclusion, I reflect further upon what the results of this study may suggest in terms of the possibilities of action for constructive change. This is the question left open at the end of my discussion in Chapter Three concerning the viability of conducting social constructionist, collaborative research in a closed institution. Because my epistemological orientation has been a key element in the design, implementation and writing of this dissertation, considerations must go beyond the traditional academic concern with implications for current theory and future research. Also necessary is reflection upon applied ramifications for the practices of teaching and policy development (and associated indications for structural change). I turn first to the evaluation of the outcome of my methodological approach promised at the conclusion of Chapter Three. I then review the key practical and theoretical issues raised by the study results in terms of an action potential.

**Collaborative Research in the High School: Examining the Reality**

Reason and Bradbury (2001) acknowledge that "no action research project can address all issues equally and that choices must be made about what is important in the emergent and messy work" of an individual project (p.454). What they advocate is that
researchers “pay attention to the congruence between the quality of participation we espouse and the actual work we accomplish” (p.448). Doing so has been an important part of my epistemological approach to this research. In Chapter Three, I compared the theoretical ideal concerning the conduct of collaborative research with the practical realities faced when the research field is a closed institution like the high school, and the researcher a graduate student bound also by the institutional conditions of the university. Concluding that the ideal was not attainable, I followed the process of my own research from inception to analysis, arguing for a flexible methodology that could both manage and challenge these structural constraints in ways that would maximize collaborative opportunities. I ended the chapter with a commitment to return to these issues at the conclusion of my dissertation and offer an evaluation of the collaborative methodology I employed. To do so, I draw on Reason and Bradbury's (2001) framework of five questions for assessing the quality of action research and Torbet's (1981) six suggestions for the design of collaborative inquiry with students. From these combined criteria I have identified three key questions to ask: What is the quality of the collaborative relationship?; To what extent is there inclusion of multiple knowledge perspectives?; Are the research outcomes appropriate and useful to the collaborating communities?

The Collaborative Relationship

In Chapter Three, I discussed the impediments closed institutions, such as the high school, pose to maximizing students’ role as consistent research collaborators. Within the context of available possibilities, I did nevertheless explicitly develop and

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314 Torbet's suggestions have been presented in Chapter Three. Reason & Bradbury (2001) evolve their five questions by basing them on critical choice points throughout the Action Research process. Specifically they ask: Is the action research: Explicit in developing a praxis of relational-participation?; Guided by reflexive concern for practical outcomes?; Inclusive of a plurality of knowledge (ensuring conceptual-theoretical integrity? Embracing ways of knowing
establish collaborative relationships with students at least some of which were maintained throughout all stages of the research process. First, although the research issue was pre-identified by the researcher, students were involved in confirming the importance and relevance to students and potentially to other stakeholder groups (teachers, policy makers, academic researchers). Second, the approach I took broke ground in the conduct of research with students, including involving collaborators in the development of the research instruments and dissemination of results. Third, the resulting data are clearly relevant to the stakeholder groups. However, the pertinence of results to the actual participants raises a question mark. The young people who took part in the study have now passed from the high school and it is impossible to know what if anything they personally gained from their participation. Certainly, a number of participants strongly endorsed the research effort and collaborators taking part in dissemination activities have expressed enthusiasm for the research findings. But, unquestionably, more material and moral support for the collaborative concept, both at the school board and university levels, could have facilitated stronger collaborative roles for students. I take up elements of this issue again in considering the research outcomes.

**Inclusion of Multiple Knowledges**

Reason and Bradbury (2001) and Torbet (1981) raise several related questions to be considered in assessing the inclusion of different knowledge perspectives: Are ways of knowing beyond the mere intellect embraced? Are research methods intentionally chosen to facilitate multiple knowledges? Can study variables be changed through dialogue? Are conflicts between differing reality models welcomed as contributions to new knowledge? Are interruptions and barriers to the research beyond intellect? Intentionally choosing appropriate research methods?); Worthy of the term significant?; Emerging towards a new and enduring infrastructure?(p.454).
welcomed as contributions to increased awareness of the issues? Are the researcher’s activities also observed and noted? Is the validity of the data measured by its pertinence to the issues, and its intellectual, emotional and practical ability to increase understanding and effective response to them?

Because the driving purpose and orientation of this study was to include the experiences and multiple realities of the students, I conclude that the quality of the study rates positively on the above criteria. The student involvement achieved prior to the main data collection ensured dialogue about study variables and questions. The recursive interview also promotes a collaborative dialogue in which participants are encouraged to draw on and explore their own multiple knowledges while the input of the researcher is made clear. The data presented in Chapters Four and Five illustrate the success of this approach. My presentation and discussion of the results and potential implications is built upon what the participants actually said and the pertinence and validity can be judged by that content. I have also attempted to make my activities transparent within the dissertation writing.

I have already argued that the additional challenges, problems and delays posed by the chaotic climate of educational reform added a major element to this dissertation. While I cannot honestly declare that I actually welcomed barriers and disruptions, I have certainly treated them as important contributions to the construction of new knowledge. This dissertation research has the potential to contribute to increased understanding and constructive change, but again the unanswered question arises—will there be effective practical outcomes?

The Usefulness of Research Outcomes

I think that there are several important dimensions on which to evaluate the usefulness of research outcomes. The first question to ask is: useful to whom and in what way? Next is the issue of potential for applicability and usefulness versus what is
actually likely to happen in practice. On this issue, Torbet (1981) and Reason & Bradbury (2001) seem to hold diametric views. Concerned with the specific challenges of educational research, Torbet suggests that the knowledge interest should be uniquely relevant to the particular time and place of the research and the interest in generalizability concerned with the lives of the participants (p.149). Torbet’s intent is to challenge positivist tests of reliability and validate qualitative and non-random samples such as the one in this study. In the attempt he appears, however, to condemn most research with students to momentary value at the best. This is clearly problematic for my study as my participants have moved beyond the time and place of the research. In contrast, Reason and Bradbury argue for evidence that the research contributes to “a new and enduring infrastructure,” a seemingly lofty goal for most research, action oriented or otherwise. Reason & Bradbury do, however, offer some qualification of these criteria. They argue that there are first, second, and third levels of research practice and action all of which must be integrated in order for enduring consequences to emerge. In this argument, the insights and learning attempts of one individual researcher can influence another until, eventually, a group works together to establish structural change. While the ideal action research collaboration should incorporate all three levels, it is recognized that such projects and outcomes require groundwork.

Working from that perspective, I can argue that this dissertation research represents an individual attempt to push boundaries and create new knowledge that can potentially change educational practice, research and theory. My use of textual representations of dominant and counter discourses to capture the social context of the students' stories of action worked well. Although imperfect, I developed a collaborative research model that that provided rich data and knew knowledge for provocative debate, at least within the academic community. In terms of collaborative research goals, I do not however consider this a sufficient action outcome and I think it is important to resist
the temptation to use Reason and Bradbury’s arguments as a validation of any action research effort, regardless of outcome. I remain concerned that I have failed to give anything of significance back to the majority of the students who participated in this study. As the researcher “breaking in” to the school, I had to be sufficiently positive and encouraging to motivate the students to participate. While I tried to also be honest and realistic about the possibilities of the project, there is an ethical, and possibly irresolvable, dilemma involved in raising consciousness and expectation that real change can occur. Breaking ground is a necessary start and the inclusion of students in dissemination activities has been powerful, but these are small triumphs that do not guarantee lasting impact. I can only hope that in the long term the students’ voices will be heard and acted upon because, if applied to future research and policy planning, results from this study could prompt constructive changes in structural conditions at various levels. I continue to strive for that outcome whenever I can find opportunity to do so, but in the interim I can only hope that being part of the process was reward enough for most of the students.

As I stated in Chapter Two, the degree of macro structural determination and resistance to real systemic change can be daunting. I have to admit that I am more inclined at the conclusion of my doctoral process than at the outset to underline Heaney’s (1993) assertion that the structural conditions of the university make it impossible for graduate students to conduct participatory/collaborative research. Obviously, it is not totally impossible as I and others have done it, but the costs are high. As Heaney argues, rules of the graduate studies game demand individual achievement - a factor at odds with collaborative principles. Inadequate graduate funding promotes a climate of competition, and fieldwork in general (because it entails more time and expense) is penalized rather than rewarded. Moore (2004) recently likened the
experience of doing participatory research as a graduate student to "living in the basement of the ivory tower" (p. 157).

In the present climate I find it difficult to recommend to graduate students that they consider collaborative methodology (or even undertaking field research), but at the same time I protest the conditions that promote such an attitude. I continue to believe that we cannot simply abandon the attempt to give such communities a research voice. In closed institutions, if outsiders make no attempt to break in and find ways to release the voices of the captive populations, how will they ever be heard? There is no reason that the outside researcher necessarily be an academic, but even in the present climate of scarce university resources, it is, as Kelly (1993) argues, this group that is still most likely to be able to muster sufficient freedom and support for such an enterprise.

Furthermore, another rule of the graduate studies game is that students’ work should challenge the edges of present knowledge. There are strong grounds to argue that innovative graduate efforts should be better encouraged, and not admonished, and I do think that there are potentials for constructive change in the structural conditions of graduate studies if the right arguments are advanced. For example, as discussed in my Introduction, one of the major challenges for a social constructionist approach to research remains the necessity to simultaneously examine multiple facets of the social context and the action within them. Research collaborations that focus around specific research issues may be an effective approach to this challenge. Such research partnerships would have the capacity to produce distinct and individual work from several graduate students while also maximizing knowledge and material resource support for collaborative approaches.

315 In fact, I think graduate studies in Canada, especially in the social sciences and humanities, are in real crisis. If academe does not move to create more supportive and viable graduate studies climates there will be few future graduates. Under current structural conditions, who will even begin?
Implementing such ideas will require very significant changes in the traditional assumptions and practices of academe, but in our age of electronic communications such alliances could be local or national in scope and might even attract significant research funding.\(^{316}\) Personally, I consider collaboration and alliance among academics, and between academics and the community, to be the only viable future for social science research.

\textit{The Students' Story of Action: A Different Perspective on Structure-Agency Relations}

In telling their own story of the action, the study participants tugged hard at some previously cherished notions concerning the relations of structure, agency and resistance. What they had to say, and the compelling nature of their thoughts and experiences, challenge dominant constructions of students as incompetent social agents, and unsettles previous conceptualizations of what actually constitutes structural resistance and collective action. Discussion and details of the results are presented in preceding chapters; here I highlight the related action implications of these three significant areas for practice, research and theory as I discuss the emergent profile of the student-agent, the shifting grounds of resistance; and alliance and negotiation as strategies of action.

\textbf{The Emergent Profile of the Student-Agent}

From out of this study, where the research focus was on the \textit{majority} of students and the participants told their own story, steps a different student-agent - a highly social, remarkably adept social negotiator with a lot to say. In Chapter One, I used Goffman's

\(^{316}\) There is structural shift that suggests these ideas may actually be possible to bring about. At the time of writing the Social Science and Humanities Council of Canada is in the process of restructuring consultations. The consultation document, "From Granting Council to Knowledge Council," emphasizes collaborative research alliances in general and proposes establishing academic and community alliances for graduate student training.
(1961) description of a closed institution to argue that students in high school are subjected to conditions society otherwise only imposes on those who have failed to act as ‘productive citizens,’ such as criminals and psychiatric patients. While the ‘cure’ rates for prisons and asylums are notoriously low, the majority of Ontario students survive school and emerge with a diploma. Furthermore, despite unrelenting dominant social discourses about their incompetence in a social context riddled with all manner of risks, students generally retain remarkable optimism about their unfolding lives.

The students participating in this study were not wildly rebellious; not irresponsibly idling their lives away; and not unthinkingly either accepting or rejecting of school and other social mores and pressures. Instead, the student-agents were active, reflective, information seekers, tapping multiple sources and people to assist them in decision making; hard workers shouldering a combined workload similar to that of most adults; demanding of agency recognition, but desirous of wise counsel not sole control and responsibility.

In considering this profile of student agency it is important not to conflate agency acts with either efficacy of outcome or acts of rebellion and resistance. The results in this study suggest very strongly that most student consistently attempt to exercise control over their present and future lives. They appear as skilled negotiators who act to accumulate and apply social and educational capital in order to attain social success. They observe, accurately, that social success usually increases social power and opportunity, and thus, individual agency. The implications of this for resistant acts I will speak to in a moment, but in order for their actions and decisions to be productive, students must have accurate information on which to base them.

I have pointed out in Chapter Four that the onus is on adults to address these knowledge gaps. First, there must be recognition that students are social agents striving for positive outcomes, to the best of their knowledge and ability. Following from this
recognition, adults must consult with students to properly understand what their information and guidance needs actually are. Once identified, adults must act to support (not try to suppress) student agency by ensuring they have access to accurate and reliable information and the skills to access and apply it to meet their own needs. This process requires action at all three of the levels suggested by Reason and Bradbury (2001). Self-reflection on erroneous assumptions is a starting point, not just in connection with our construction of adolescents, but also in terms of what knowledge adults actually do, or do not, possess about the future choices and concerns confronting students. The information we provide should be accurate, but also constructive and encouraging. We need to be careful about insisting adolescents need “a reality check” – What is it that we really mean by this? Students in this study knew well enough there were social risks to be faced. There is some suggestion from the results that knowledge denial is employed as a protective defence mechanism when such knowledge threatens to become overwhelming. So, exactly how ‘realistic’ an attitude is developmentally healthy at this stage in their lives? What they need is encouragement to maximize potential and strive for their goals. Encouragement should not come in the form of empty platitudes, but as concrete, accurate factual information that points out what is needed to attain aspirations, while not eliminating possible alternatives in the process. If key individuals (formal educators, parents, students) understand what the needs are, they can share a new vision, alliances and negotiations for systemic recognition and change. Most particularly, the education system should be ensuring that students with low social/educational capital can compensate for this lack via the school, not be further penalized and punished for it. This is not just a question of overt discrimination, but a matter of recognizing that some students are disadvantaged by school work assigned as homework, that some students have, of necessity heavy paid work and family responsibilities, and these disadvantages tend to cluster.
The Shifting Grounds of Resistance

Previous theorizing about student resistance has persistently applied a conflated conceptualization that equates agency manifestation with rebellious acts directed against educational structure. The underlying assumption is that agency occurs only in opposition to structural compliance. Those who do not overtly rebel are assumed to comply passively and do so only because they are unconscious of the constraints. Once there is recognition that social structure may also enable, such a position simply makes no sense. If structure can under some circumstances enable personal agency, then consciousness about social structure will surely be likely to provoke agency acts aimed at increasing rewards as well as minimizing constraints. Presented as an ‘if-then’ logical statement this seems somewhat obvious, but it has not been applied to theorizing about students’ relations to the school/educational structure. It is, however, the picture of agency-structure relations present in this research.

From the perspective of the students in the study, the relations of structure and resistance are highly dynamic, constantly calculated, and manifest in shifting forms of action. I have argued in Chapter Five that the majority of student acts identifiable as resistant to structural constraint take the form of structural negotiation aimed to increase the student-agent’s chances of gaining the enabling life-rewards formal educational achievement offers. As reflective, socially observant, risk-calculating agents, students ‘know’ the following about the structure-agency relations of educational systems: failure to attain formal education has very negative social consequences; resistance to structural imperatives is always constrained; actual overt rebellion, on a small or large scale, does not have an encouraging social history; structure at every level will resist

317 Richer (1990) does reflect on some of these issues, suggesting that sociologists have neglected the school-student relationship and insufficiently recognized students as reflective and calculating human agents. He argues there is a need to distinguish between types of resistance
agent resistance, even in the form of reasonable and rational attempts to attain constructive change; careful negotiation can, however, increase the chances of personal success while simultaneously making the conditions of schooling more tolerable.

I have also argued in Chapter Five that as the social context changes over time, so do the conditions of structure and the viability of different forms of resistant response. I cited the example of different relations between economic opportunity and formal education acquisition as a factor potentially explaining some difference between students’ choices in the early 1970s and now. I would add to that the need to also consider changing historical knowledge. The participants in this study have grown up seeing (sometimes living through) the crumbling civil structures left in the wake of failed revolutions. They have no evidence on which to base hope that collective, overt rebellion leads to constructive change. Rebellion is an act of desperation to be employed only when there is nothing left to lose.

The study data are provocative and raise interesting theoretical challenges and questions for further inquiry and debate. It has already been suggested to me that it is possible to view the study participants as disappointingly accepting of current structural conditions. Indeed, if the starting perspective is one of imminent transformation this may be so. But if the perspective is the one of the hopelessly constrained prisoner presented in Chapter One of this dissertation, then these students are remarkably shrewd and active structural negotiators. Even from the former perspective, I would argue that the participants are far from being unconscious and naive concerning structure-agency relations. If they do accept it is as one of them said, because they “don’t see any central gain” in rebelling. [104M12]
Alliance and Negotiation: A Different Concept of 'Collective' Action?

Perhaps the most unsettling aspect of the students’ views for previous social theory about the relations of structure, agency, resistance and change are the implications for the traditional conceptualization (and hope) of collective action. Study participants were not hopeful about collective action. Added to the socio-historic observations I have made above, is the divisive sub-text of the official discourse. Such content is present because of its power to undermine the unity of sub–groups and thus discourage collective organized demands for systemic change. The students not only doubted the possibility of their own student group uniting for resistant action, they also failed to perceive the collective action of the teacher federations in a positive light. From their position in the structural system, this kind of collective action was seen as having a negative, not positive, outcome because teachers’ united action had immediately negative consequences for the students’ educational experiences. Perhaps students did not fully grasp the bigger picture regarding the long-term negative impacts on education that were under protest. On the other hand, some students clearly expressed cynicism that anything would really change as a result of the reforms – a point of view my examination of historic reform in Ontario tends to support more than refute.

When students did talk about possibilities of action for change, they were usually describing a case where relatively few individuals came together around a specific issue. Whether the issue was in-school recycling or changing a school environment of racism and violence, the examples had important common elements: some members of each of the three front-line triad groups (students teachers and parents) all agreed there was something to take action about; parents are seen as the most powerful individual agents - not a collectivity, but a bridging force between student and school staff (and sometimes
the school board); engagement with the educational structure for consultation and negotiation were the strategies employed; all three groups took an active part in finding and applying a solution.

Ottawa students also had other models of alliances to draw on. School councils provided another example of group representation and dialogue rather than of united collectives. As can be seen in Chapter Two, joint school council representatives were quite powerful and could sometimes be oppositional in their negotiation tactics. Nevertheless, engagement and negotiation with the structure was the basic strategy, with official discourse content as the basis for challenge. The struggles of the joint school council and the teachers’ federations around the reform initiatives continued for several years and seemed, during the field research period, to entail more losses than victories. Eventually, however, the teachers, school boards and parents became united in their opposition to reform policies and the government was forced to make a series of concessions. Of particular interest, in my opinion, is that the turning point seems to have stemmed from two tactical decisions by the Teachers’ Federations: to attack one social structure with another (i.e., the civil justice system versus the Ministry of Education); and in the face of the first victory of this kind, to switch entirely from traditional collective resistance acts (walk-outs, protest marches, etc) to these more

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318 Students did not seem to consider the kind of collective organization involved in classroom disruption as action for change, which is interesting. Why do students not see any potential for this power to be used more ambitiously and constructively?

319 The role of school councils is something that has emerged from the study data. I did not, therefore ask students questions concerning their awareness of involvement with members of these councils. I do know that, although mandated, councils were not active in all schools, and not welcomed by the administration in others. This is an area related to action for change worthy of further research investigation.

320 The government was forced to make concessions to the teachers but had not actually backed down from taking over the management of several school Boards when they lost the 2003 election. It seems unlikely that the ME could really micro manage these school boards for very long, and likely the chaos of their educational policies contributed to their defeat, but then so did other issues, such as major water pollution scandals. As I noted in Chapter 5, it would be interesting to know what if any effect these later events had on the students’ views of collective
subversive structural negotiation tactics. In light of these observations, it seems that students, along with their parents and eventually teachers' representatives, may be somewhat ahead of the academics in developing and applying new approaches to action for change.

There is much more to learn about these alliances and negotiations, but the data from this study do seem to suggest potential for change via boundary-crossing alliances. Once consciously recognized, the ways in which the front-line triad of agents (teachers, students and parents) are constructed and positioned in particular ways within the process of formal public education has as much potential to enable action as to constrain it. Students think that unity for collective action among any group is unlikely, and perhaps not even very constructive in terms of outcomes for the group’s own members, never mind those of the other front-line agents. They may have a valid point and certainly it is worthy of further consideration. On the other hand, they strongly believe individual action, including the formation of alliances to attain desired outcomes, can improve social context conditions. This suggests ground on which to strengthen networks and alliances among members of the front-line triad for future action to gain constructive changes to the education system that utilizes pressure points provided within the contentions and contradictions of the official discourse. Students are very cognizant of the advantages of cross-group alliances; adults can learn from what students know and act upon.

**But Is Anyone Listening Yet?**

My agenda for action involves alliances within and among the three front line groups to take action at the three levels: individual; shared micro interactions, and united action. Because of the dynamic nature of social context, attempts to unravel and understand resistance to social structure will always have this murky and uncertain quality.
meso/macro challenge. The recognition, sharing and valuing of different knowledge perspectives is key. Students and their teachers are the practice and outcomes 'experts' yet neither group is properly consulted. Parents can be powerful bridging agents as long as they too listen and learn from both points of view. United collectives may be impossible to achieve, but representative alliances are a proven possibility. Such alliances can mount strong challenges based on the functional premises and assertions the system self-generates. For example, strong fiscal and attainment arguments can be made for properly tapping and responding to front line knowledge. Given the dominance and wide acceptance of the discourse concerning the advantages of formal education, a deep national commitment to investing the necessary funds to support an effective formal education system should be a core social expectation. Governments should be compelled to meet their own postulations and pursue (at least in the context of their own economic and citizenship arguments) the best possible return on the billions of tax dollars invested in formal education. It makes outcome sense to include front-line knowledge in policy development, implementation and evaluation.

Those on the front-lines of education practice are not the only groups to be challenged to action. Universities and the academics in them claim to have an active and essential social role in the creation of knowledge and should be expected to live up to that claim. Understanding the social world and experience of children and adolescents is a vital component in achieving effective formal and social education. A strong research and evaluation agenda examining every aspect of education content and delivery with particular attention to the front-line experiences of students and their teachers should, therefore, be demanded and insisted upon. Nothing could be further from the climate in Ontario during the period of this research project, or for that matter in Canada generally and this needs to change.
My discussion of results and these conclusions include some specific suggestions for academic and practice policies. I would like to think that my research findings and related recommendations can be further disseminated and acted upon. My experience in conducting this research does not lead to optimism, however. What I have observed is a strong impetus to marginalize and thus avoid hearing what students (or those who attempt to speak out on their behalf) have to say. The study participants also harboured both doubt and hope about the ability of the research to really make a difference, and they made this clear in the comments they wrote at the end of their questionnaires:

I think it is good to have a survey for the students so the school board can maybe make some changes for the students. [03M9]

Will our answers affect the way our schools are? Will we know the results of this...who will know the results? [25F9]

I thank you for taking the time and for caring enough to do this – hopefully it will help. [79F12]

I think this is a great thesis idea and I wish you luck! [217F12]

What is the purpose...? Will you benefit from this? [183M9]

I'm glad that research is being done with information from the people who are in school. [163M9]

Will this have any affect in anyway? [186M9]

This questionnaire was very organized. I enjoyed doing it very much. I think education is taking a turn for the better, it is just going to take some time for change. [147F12]

Whether in doubt or hope, what the students said on their questionnaires and in their interviews, is sociologically important, often socially poignant, and above all vital to informing effective educational program and policy decisions. Creating a space for their voices was a first step, but their contributions deserve better exposure than I have so far been able to provide. Really listening to the students is what makes the difference in the
resulting knowledge and I still believe that the possibilities made the effort worthwhile.

But is anyone else out there listening yet?
REFERENCES


Frye, N. (1962). *Design for learning: Reports submitted to the Joint Committee of the Toronto Board of Education and the University of Toronto*. Toronto: Toronto UP.


Hillcrest High School Council (1996/97). Assorted minutes and reports. Listed in Appendix B: HCSC.


Ontario Teachers’ Federations. (1996/97). Assorted memoranda from print and electronic media sources. Listed in Appendix B: TF


Wadsworth, Y. (2201). The mirror, the magnifying glass, the compass and the map: Facilitating participatory action research. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), Handbook of action research (pp.420-4432). Thousand Oaks: Sage.


APPENDIX A

Special Agents: Profiles of the Student Collaborators
SPECIAL AGENTS

Profiles of the Student Collaborators

The "Special Agents" are students who specifically volunteered their own time to collaborate with me at some point in the process of developing analyzing and reporting this research. They did not complete the finalized questionnaire or formal interview. Over 100 additional students were involved during school class time in the development of the research instruments. Some of the special agents are specifically mentioned in the dissertation and the agent numbering begins with these agents in order of their appearance.

Agent #1
An informal collaborator from the inception to completion of my dissertation, Agent #1 offered comments on previous literature while still in Grade 8. Articulate and high achieving she was usually overtly conformist, but actually hated school, claiming it "sucked all the energy out." Completing high school as an Ontario Scholar she moved away from home and lived independently, making the Dean's Honours list during her first two years of a double major. Immediately after her second year examinations she moved to the USA and married an American she met on the Internet. She has been accepted into an Economics program at an American college for Fall 2004.

Agent #2
An informal collaborator and close friend of Agent #1, with whom she entered and exited high school and moved on to the same university, but entered a different program, living in residence during her first year. During high school Agent #2 was an exceptionally hard working, disciplined, high achiever, who chose a Canadian academic university scholarship over an American athletic offer. She continues her academic and athletic success, competing at the provincial and national levels.

Agent #3
An informal collaborator who entered high school shortly before the conception of the study, Agent #3 was able to maintain good grades with little effort but enjoyed high school as an interesting social arena where he excelled in drama. On leaving high school, he entered an English program at an out of province university, but after almost failing his first year, he dropped out and returned to Ottawa. The following year he successfully completed an expensive diploma in Internet web page design - just in time for the 'high-tech crash.' Unable to find employment, Agent #3 is now attending university in Ottawa. Agent # 3 has offered commentary throughout my dissertation, including to theoretical discussion, has taken part in a dissemination event and attended the 'Thesis Examination'.

Agent #4
An informal collaborator throughout most of the dissertation process, he first met Agent #3 at their high school orientation. On completing high school, he entered an Ottawa university, living at home during his first year. After moving into an apartment with friends during his second year, financial stress caused Agent #4 to take some time off during his degree in order to earn money. He is now close to completion, however.
Agent #4 took part in many conversations related to his high school experiences and my research. He has participated in a dissemination event.

Agent #5
Agent #5 became a collaborator as a participant in a dissemination event. A high achieving student, she was articulate in conveying her experiences and issues connected with school counselling to an audience of career development professionals. Subsequently, Agent #5 commented further on study findings. After completing high school she travelled to India.

Agent #6
One of the formal study collaborators, Agent #6 had just completed Grade 9 when she commenced her collaboration with me. She was already active on the student council and remained active in student affairs throughout high school. She is currently attending university in Ottawa. On educational policy she said: "It must be hard being in charge of a Ministry…Ministers should go to a whole bunch of schools and have assemblies with students….to really listen to what hey have to say…he should make time, dress casual - not a media opportunity - a relaxed setting." School and work commitments have so far prevented her from participating in dissemination events.

Agent #7
A formal study collaborator, Agent #7 was a friend of Agent #3 entering Grade 12 during the year the study was conducted. At the time of her collaboration, she intended to complete graduate studies. After completing high school, she attended an Ottawa university for one year before going to the USA and marrying a man she met on the Internet. The last news I had she planned to attend an American college. Formerly a close contact, Agent #7 is currently missing in action!

Agent #8
A formal study collaborator about to enter a Grade 9 'gifted' program during the study year, Agent #8 is the daughter of a high school teacher and became part of the double cohort graduating June 2003. She was critical of career guidance material after completing a Grade 8 aptitude test. She commented: "according to the test, half my class are supposed to be flower arrangers!" Agent #8 participated in a dissemination event shortly before completing high school. She attended an Ottawa university for one year but now intends to take a year off to travel.

Agent #9
A formal study collaborator and older sister of Agent #8, Agent #9 had just completed Grade 9 when she commenced her collaboration. After completing her OAC year, she entered an out of province program where most of her fellow students had graduated from four-year high school programs. At the end of her first university year, Agent #9 was dissatisfied with her university experience due to the lack of social maturity and lower educational attainment she perceived in her younger classmates. She took part in a dissemination event at that time. In summer 2004 she gained a spot with a repertory theatre to perform 'Shakespeare by the Sea.'

Agent #10
A formal collaborator who had just graduated from Grade 12, Agent #10 first met me at an in-school session about my proposed research. She persuaded several of her friends to also be collaborators during the development stage of the study. She was enrolling in
a community college bartending course that Fall. She commented: "school is not a community - they say it is, but it's not...because of the distance between teachers and students - the way students are treated."

Agent #11
A formal collaborator and friend of Agent #10, Agent #11 had just turned 20 and was still in the process of gaining his high school diploma via an alternative program. He reported a troubled school experience. Always bored and in trouble for not sitting still, he has now been diagnosed and treated for ADD, but during regular high school was "quite heavily into drugs and skipping." He said, "you can only sit there for so long. It's like a jail; trapped in this room having to listen to what someone wants to tell you," but "in alternative school you are treated more like another person, not a student." Agent #11 is now aiming to complete an undergraduate degree.

Agent #12
A formal collaborator and friend of Agent #10, Agent #12 had been out of high school one year since graduating from Grade 12. She worked full-time in food services and had never contemplated going further with her formal education. She accompanied Agent #10 on a walk-out protest while in school, but "only so as to be part of it."

Agent #13
Another friend of Agent #10 who had just completed high school, Agent #13 happened on the group in progress and joined in on an informal basis. She commented on the stress created by parents who hold unrealistic expectations, and the frustration of seeing "students skipping and walking away with an A when I never skipped and got 50s."

Agent #14
Agent #14 was an OAC student who took part in the questionnaire phase of the study but he was not selected for an interview. While I was conducting interviews at his school, he found me at the bus stop and asked why he hadn't been chosen. I explained the random selection and offered him a special interview. He told me that he understood all about 'skew' and volunteered for a role as an informal collaborator. Agent #14 was very critical of the standard of information technology teaching at his school, complaining that he knew more than his teachers and they resented him for this. About the school reforms he stated: "they cut money out, then they make a big deal about putting it back in again." During the following weeks he kept me updated on school news.

Agent #15
A grade12 student who refused to complete the questionnaire during the in-class session, Agent #15 was subsequently impressed with the in-class discussion about my research and asked to talk with me on an informal basis. He was an intelligent and articulate student, but a 'resister' who was highly cynical about the education system and survey researchers! He commented that "most researchers don't really care what the students think" and on principle refused to participate in their studies.
Agent #16
The son of a university academic, Agent #16 was about to enter Grade 9 the year of the study. He did not want to be a formal collaborator, but completed a pilot survey on an informal basis and had periodic conversation with me during the study period. He is currently completing a college diploma.

Agent #17
Agent #17 was not known to me at the time of the formal collaboration, but later became a close friend of Agent #1. She spent many hours over the next few years talking about her high school experiences. Unsure of what she wants to do as a future career, after completing her OACs Agent #17 obtained a student visa and worked in Scotland for one year. She returned to Ottawa just in time to accompany Agent #3 to the thesis examination. She is accepted at an Ottawa university for Fall 2004. Commenting on remarks made at the thesis examination she said, "if I had gone straight to university, I so would have resented being there, but now I am going because I want to and I know I will do better because of that."

Agent #18
A friend of Agents #1 and #17, Agent #18 was in the younger half of the double cohort. She also spent many hours sharing her school experiences with me. She travelled in Europe after graduating in the summer of 2003, but returned to begin university in Ottawa that Fall. She is spending summer 2004 working in the Yukon before continuing her university studies in September.

Agent #19
Brother to Agent #5, Agent #19 was among the collaborators attending the career development dissemination event.

Agent #20
Agent #21
Agent #23
These female students were also selected to attend the career development dissemination event, but did not subsequently keep in touch.
APPENDIX B

Alphabetical Code Key to Supporting Texts Cited in Chapter Two
APPENDIX B

Alphabetical Code Key to Supporting Texts Cited in Chapter Two

_Hillcrest School Council (HCSC)_

HCSC1 Joint Council representative’s report. Nov./Dec. 1996
HCSC2 Minutes, February 25, 1997

_Joint Council of Ontario Board of Education School Councils (JC)_

JC2 Recommendations of the Joint Council of elementary and secondary school advisory committees, February 19, 1997
JC3 Director’s message: Snobelen attack on OBE & McHugh Schools, JC e-mail, March 27, 1997
JC4 Transcript: Radio Noon, April 9, 1997, Ottawa, JC e-mail, April 14, 1997
JC5 Special OBE Board meeting, and attachments (junior kindergarten) JC e-mail, May 21, 1997
JC6 Note from the Director on the Regular Board Meeting, May 26, 1997, JC e-mail, May 27, 1997
JC7 “Consultation” on electoral boundaries, JC e-mail, May 29, 1997
JC10 Monday night’s meeting, JC e-mail, June 24, 1997
JC11 Representatives report, JC e-mail, June 25, 1997

_Ministry of Education and Training (ME)_

_Backgrounder:_

BG5 Snobelen seeks technical advice on student-focused funding model, May 21, 1997
BG20 Highlights of the New School Program, January 9, 1998

_News Release_

NR1 Moving Ontario students to the head of the class, November 1996
NR3 Province-wide standard report card in school for field testing, October, 1996
NR4 Education Improvement Commissions announced, June 3, 1997
NR5 Ontario will stream grade 9 to promote student success, June 20, 1997
NR7 Johnson launches Education Week Focusing on excellence
NR8 High School Reform Increases Emphasis on Math, Language and Science; Promotes responsible citizenship, January 9, 1998
NR12 Ontario’s Investment in Education Grows by 190,000,000, March 9, 2000
NR13 Ecker Reaffirms Commitment to Uphold the Law, March 10, 2000
NR14 Ontario Releases Code of Conduct and Takes Action for Safer Schools, April 26, 2000
NR15 Ecker Announces Plan to Strengthen School Councils, June 30, 2000
NR16 Supervisor Appointed to Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board, August 30, 2002
NR17 Supervisor to be Appointed to the Toronto District School Board, August 27, 2002
NR18 Supervisor Appointed to Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, August 20, 2002

Policy Documents

Bill 104 1st session, 36th Parliament, Ontario, 1997
CG Consultation Guide, September 1996
EIC The future role of school councils: Discussion paper, May 1998
OCL The Ontario curriculum grades 1-8: Language, 1997
OCM The Ontario curriculum grades 1-8: Math, 1997
OS1 Our Schools - Number 1, May, 1997
PPM 122 Provincial Policy Memorandum: School board policies on school councils, April 1995
SCH School council handbook: a resource for members of school councils, 1996

Publicity Pamphlets

PP1 Are we on the Right Track?, April 1998
PP2 Ontario Education: Opening the Door to Success, 1999
PP5 Update: Education Reform, Spring/Summer 1998
PP6 Education: Changes for the Better to Help Your Children, Wall chart measure, September 1998
PP7 Update: Helping Your Child Learn, Fall 1998
PP8 Education: Learning for Life, Report to Ontario Tax Payers, Fall 2000
PP10 Setting the Standard for Excellence, Fall 2001
**Ottawa Board of Education (OBE)**

OBE1  Report No. 96-22 from the Administration to the Education Committee. Junior kindergarten/senior kindergarten, February 12, 1996
OBE3  Ministry of Education funding model: Response, October 11, 1996
OBE4  Staff reductions made necessary by OBE budget. News Release, April 30, 1997
OBE5  Just the facts: The truth about possible changes to education, October, 1996
OBE6  Building our future. Newsletter, June, 1997

**Ottawa-Carleton Assembly of School Councils (OCASC)**

OCASC2  Sweeping New Powers, Email, May 8, 2000
OCASC3  OCASC Motion regarding Bill C74, May 18, 2000
OCASC5  Teachers Dash Tories’ Expectations, Toronto Star article, September 23, 2000, cited in OCASC Email, September 28, 2000
OCASC6  Attention School Councils, Discussion Document, Email from R.A. Currie, March 22, 1998
OCASC7  Toronto Poll Shows Public Supports Teachers, Not Tories, Email, September 18, 2000
OCASC9  News clip from the Globe and Mail, Email, April 17, 2000

**Ottawa-Carleton-District School Board (OCDSB)**

OCDSB3  Address to Board of Trustees by Jim Greive, Director of Education, Friday, August 7, 1998
OCDSB4  Memorandum from Jim Greive, Director of Education, November 18, 1998
OCDSB7  Speaking Out on Bill 74, June 1, 2000

**Ottawa Citizen (OC)**

OC1  The revenge of the dropout. Patrick Dare & Francine Dubé. Friday, December 27, 1996, A1
OC1a  “Invent a Crisis”, Minister Urged Education Staff. Richard Brennan, Wednesday, September 13, 1995
OC2  School boards ordered to pare education costs. Francine Dubé. Thursday, November 30, 1995, B3
OC3  Minister questions language skills of Grade 9 students. John Ibbitson. Thursday, November 2, 1995, B1
OC5  Snobelen’s school plan priceless. Carolyn Abraham. Wednesday, April 23, 1997
OC6  Teachers denounce ‘vindictive’ new rules. Carolyn Abraham & Richard Brenna, Friday, October 31, 1997
OC7  Harris restructures Snobelen. Carolyn Abraham, Richard Brennan & Greg Crone, Friday, October 10, 1997
OC9  Minister denies changes will gut school funding. Richard Brennan. Friday, October 17, 1998
OC10  Teachers Told to Get Ready for Paycut.  John Ibbitson, Saturday, January 20, 1996
OC15  You Want It? Come and Get It, OBE tells Minister.  Cathy Campbell, Friday, May 23, 1997
OC17  Teachers Fume Over Training Controversy.  Joanne Laucius, Wednesday, August 27, 1997
OC18  Unions Vow to Support Teachers.  Greg Crone, Saturday, September 27, 1977
OC19  Education Bill to Restrict Strikes by Teachers.  Richard Brennan, July 15, 1997
OC20  Harris, Snobelen Stand Firm.  Greg Crone, Wednesday, October 8, 1997
OC21  Dave Johnson’s High Noon.  Carolyn Abraham and Richard Brennan, Tuesday, October 21, 1997
OC22a  Education Reform Can’t Wait.  ME Paid Advertisement, Friday, October 31, 1997
OC22b  Our Education System Isn’t Working.  ME Paid Advertisement, Saturday, November 1, 1997
OC23  Teachers Torn Between Students, Unions.  Mike Blanchfield, Monday, October 27, 1997
OC25a  Judge Questions Early Court Bid.  Carolyn Abraham, Saturday, November 1, 1997
OC25c  School Bill on Fast Track.  Carolyn Abraham and Richard Brennan, Tuesday, November 4, 1997
OC25d  A Legal Education.  Editorial, Saturday, November 1, 1997
OC26  We Have Made Our Point.  Carolyn Abraham, Richard Brennan and Dan Nolan, Friday, November 7, 1997
OC27  ‘We’ve Been Betrayed’, Teachers Accuse Unions.  Carolyn Abraham and Richard Brennan, Saturday, November 8, 1997
OC28  Schools Won’t Get Savings from Strike, Johnson Says.  Richard Brennan, Tuesday, November 11, 1997
OC29  Bill 160 Passes.  Tuesday, December 2, 1997
OC30  Life After Bill 160 Begins in Court.  John Ibbitson, Wednesday, December 3, 1997
OC31  Teachers Greet School Reforms with Libel Suit.  Richard Brennan, Saturday, January 10, 1998
OC32  Ontario Students Get Failing Grade in Math Test.  Joanne Laucius, Saturday, February 28, 1998
OC33  Harris Defends Education Plans in Infomercial.  Richard Brennan, Tuesday, April 7, 1998
OC35  Bill 160 Takes Hit in Court.  Thursday, July 23, 1998
OC38  Assorted Paid Advertisements from Teachers Federations, September 5 to October 17, 1998
OC41  Ontario to Subject Teachers to Routine Competency Tests.  Tom Blackwell, Tuesday, April 20, 1999
OC44  Ontario Puts Teachers on Alert. April Lindgren, Friday, March 10, 2000
OC46  Ontario Flipflops on Pledge to Queen. Tom Blackwell, Friday, May 19, 2000
OC47  What Can I Do About ‘Disgusting’ School Situation? Letter to the Editor, Amanda
Rheaume, Student, Monday, September 18, 2000
OC49  Ontario Concessions Ease War with Teachers. Tom Blackwell, Tuesday, May 8,
2001
OC50  Defiant Teachers Risk Mass Firing, Mohammed Adam, Thursday, August 9,
2001

*Teachers’ Federations (TF)*

TF1  Bill 104: Provincial take-over of Ontario education. OSSTF, January 16, 1997
TF2  Redefining the classroom: Pretext for cuts. OSSTF, February 5, 1997
TF3  Boards cut teaching, administrative and support staff. OSSTF, March 4, 1997.
TF4  Message from OTF president Bill Martin. OTF, June 1997
TF5  Faxaction. FWATO, May 29, 1997
APPENDIX C

Research Instruments
Getting an Education - Finding a Job: Students’ Views

QUESTIONNAIRE INSTRUCTIONS

This questionnaire should take about 45 minutes to answer. Please read each question carefully and try to answer all questions. If you wish to ask anything about the questionnaire, raise your hand and the researcher will help you. Although it is important for the research that all the questions are answered, you do not have to answer any question(s) you do not wish to. Your cooperation and time are really appreciated.

Section One: Educational Choices and Future Plans

Please circle the number next to the answer which applies to you.

1) Are you: 1 male 2 female

2) Which Grade are you in? ________

3) How much education, in total do you expect you will get? Circle only the number next to the highest level you expect to get.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expected Level of Education</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some high school</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community college or training program diploma</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Bachelors degree</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Masters, PhD., or professional degree</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4) This question is about course choices. If you are in Grade 9 answer part A of this question and then go to Question 5. If you are in Grade 12/OAC, skip part A of this question and answer part B.

**PART A** [Grade 9 only]
If you were able to choose which eight subjects you would take next year which would you choose? List the course names below and indicate at which level you would take the course.
(i.e. Enriched = E, Advanced = A, General = G, Basic = B).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COURSE NAME</th>
<th>LEVEL</th>
<th>COURSE NAME</th>
<th>LEVEL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PART B** [Grade 12/OAC only]
Please list the courses you are taking this year and indicate at which level (i.e., Enriched = E, Advanced = A, General = G, Basic = B).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COURSE NAME</th>
<th>LEVEL</th>
<th>COURSE NAME</th>
<th>LEVEL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5) Are you enrolled in any of the following special programs?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Special Program</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>French Immersion:</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifted or Enriched</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English as a Second Language (ESL)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5) When you think about making plans and decisions for the future, to what extent are you concerned about the following?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concerns About the Future</th>
<th>Not Concerned</th>
<th>A Little Concerned</th>
<th>Quite Concerned</th>
<th>Very Concerned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being able to find a job I like</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being able to afford university/college</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making new friends</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making a job or university/college choice I find I don't like</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing the responsibility of being on my own</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being able to handle the workload</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having the right high school credits to do what I want</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a marriage and family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you are planning to go straight from high school to a full-time job, skip the next question (7) and go to question 8.

7) If you are planning to go to college or university, how do you expect to pay for this education? Select the three main sources you expect to use on the list below and number them one to three in order of the amount contributed (i.e., 1 = the highest amount, 2 = the next highest amount, 3 = the third highest amount)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Funding</th>
<th>Expect to use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student loans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships/awards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My personal savings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time work while in school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time work while in school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (specify)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8) Do you currently do work for pay? (Including Baby-sitting, or chores for which you earn money). **Circle the number next to your answer.**

1 Yes  2 No

If you answered **NO**, go straight to question 10, otherwise answer question 9.

9) What job(s) do you have? Write the name of your job, or describe what it is that you do in the space below.

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

10) For all of the activities listed below, please write in **how many hours per school week on average** you spend on each. If you spend no hours at an activity fill in a zero (0).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Hours Per Week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Homework</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family chores/ responsibilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpaid volunteer work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-line computer activities (e-mail, chat rooms, web pages, games etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
11) Do you have a job or career area in mind for when you have finished all your education? **Circle the number next to your answer.**

1  Yes  2  No

**If you answered “no,” please explain** below why you think that is, and **then go to Question 13.**

**If you answered “yes,” write your career choice** in the space provided. If there is more than one kind of work that interests you, list your first two preferences below. **Then go to question 12.**

_________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

12) What level of education do you think you will need for your **first** job choice? **Circle the number next to your answer.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Needed for my Career Choice</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some high school</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community college or training program diploma</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Bachelors degree</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Masters, PhD., or professional degree</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't know</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
13) How well do the following statements represent your views about finding a job once your education is completed? For each item below, circle the number under the heading which best represents your view.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion about employment</th>
<th>Totally Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Totally Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would not mind being unemployed for a while</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone in Canada can earn enough to support themselves, if they just try</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get a good job I will need at least a university degree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would rather collect welfare than work at a job I didn’t like</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone has the right to the kind of job that their education and training has prepared them for</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would accept a job at minimum wage rather than be unemployed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would be content with a starting wage of $10 per hour</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am not ready to consider a long-term commitment to a job</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too many people in Canada are paid less than they deserve</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would willingly move to another area to get a job I wanted</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think job security is the most important thing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would be willing to work from my home</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would accept short-term jobs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section Two:  

*Getting Information and Making Decisions*

Now, in the next set of questions, I would like to find out how you get the information that you need to complete projects and make decisions about school and other aspects of your life.

14) When you need to find out information about a topic or issue, how often do you use the following sources to find out?

**Answer both for things of personal interest and for school projects by circling the number under the heading that best represents your answer**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Information</th>
<th>School Project</th>
<th>Personal Interest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Often</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school library</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Guidance Department</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The public library</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A university library</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Internet search</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask my parents</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask a friend</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask a teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look in reference books at home</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use a CD ROM on the topic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Yellow Pages to call about it</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My school text books</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (specify)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
15) When you are in the process of making decisions about your future, which of the following things/people help you inform yourself and have an influence on the choices you make?

**Circle the number indicating how much you think each of things listed influence your decisions.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
<th>Greatly</th>
<th>Quite a bit</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Things I read and hear in the media</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends/peers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brothers and sisters</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other family members</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance counsellors</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance material</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My financial situation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The jobs I think will be available</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My current level of school achievement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My future plans for a family of my own</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What I think I will be good at</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work experience I have already had</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What interests me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (write in)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section Three: Experience of School and Views on Policies and Programs

In this section I would like to find out how you feel about the conditions at your school and what you think about the education you are getting.

16) How would you rate your school in all the areas below? For each item listed, circle the number under the heading closest to your opinion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Conditions at My School</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Quite Good</th>
<th>Quite Poor</th>
<th>Really bad</th>
<th>Don’t Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Condition of the building</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom equipment adequacy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library facilities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer availability</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of the teaching</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher interest in students</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of extra academic help when needed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of personal counselling when needed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective discipline</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal safety while at school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for students of other cultures/religions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal treatment of males and females</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero tolerance of violence and harassment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero tolerance of drugs and alcohol at school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive school spirit</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
17) For each of the following statements about school circle the number under the answer closest to your own opinion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion about School</th>
<th>Totally Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Totally Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On the whole I enjoy my time at school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of my classes at school are a complete waste of time</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I (almost) always do my homework</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of the time school staff don’t treat me like a real person</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of my friends do the best they can to get good grades</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do as little school work as I can get away with</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18) The skills Listed below are considered very important to employment success. How well do you believe your schooling is providing you with these skills? For each item below, circle the number under the heading that is closest to your opinion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SKILL</th>
<th>Very well</th>
<th>Quite Well</th>
<th>Not well</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to communicate thoughts clearly in an official language (i.e., English or French)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to write effectively in an official language</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to read a wide range of material easily</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday arithmetic and numeracy (including understanding graphs and charts)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Processing skills (e.g., using a computer to type reports)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to seek and find information on any topic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic use of E-mail</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic use of the Internet to find information</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to use CD ROMs for information searches</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to question the information obtained</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to solve problems logically and constructively</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A positive attitude towards continued learning</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To contribute positively as a member of a team</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To take on a leadership role when needed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
19) What do you think other people expect that you will do immediately after you leave high school? Answer by circling the number next to the expectation that you believe parents, friends, and teachers have of you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expected of me</th>
<th>By Parents</th>
<th>By Friends</th>
<th>By Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I will go to university</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will go to community college</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will go straight to full-time work</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will hang around not doing very much</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t know what they expect of me</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (specify)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20) Have you heard of the "Transition Years" program for students in Grades 7-9? Circle the number next to your answer

1. Yes  2. No

If you answered "no’ please go straight to question 23. If you answered "yes" Please answer questions 21.

21) Were you [are you] in the Transition Years program when you were in Grades 7-9? Circle the number next to your answer.

1. Yes  2. No  3. Don’t Know

If you answered "No“ or “Don’t Know,” please go to question 23. If you answered "yes" Please answer question 22.
22) How useful do you think the Transition Years Program was/is in helping the transition from elementary to high school? Circle the number underneath your answer and then please explain your answer below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No use at all</th>
<th>very little use</th>
<th>Quite useful</th>
<th>Extremely Useful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Explanation:**

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

23) How well-informed do you think you are about the changes to the Ontario education system and high school program that are occurring at this time? Circle the number closest to your view and then below your answer write down all the changes that you know about.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Well informed</th>
<th>Somewhat informed</th>
<th>Not well informed</th>
<th>Not informed at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Changes I am aware of (please list):**

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
24) Do you think all the recent talk about education needing improvement will effect the way your graduating year is viewed by prospective employers? Circle the number closest to your view and then explain your answer below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A great deal</th>
<th>Quite a bit</th>
<th>Very little</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Explanation:**

________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
25) What kind of effect do you think the following changes would have on high school education in Ontario?

**Circle the number under the heading that is closest to your view.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change to the education System</th>
<th>Kind of effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fewer school boards in Ontario</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fewer non-teaching support staff (janitors, counsellors, secretaries etc.) in each school</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fewer Vice principles and section heads per school</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers spend more of their day in the classroom.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased bargaining power for teachers' unions</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Province-wide testing of students' achievements</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents have more say about school programs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More funds for computer and engineering technology programs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less preparation time (spares) for teachers</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students must pass a literacy test to graduate</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students must do 40 hours of community work, on their own time, in order to graduate</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in Grades 9-10 must choose between academic-stream and applied-stream courses</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Grade 11 on, students must choose courses geared to their chosen destination (university, college, or work)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average class sizes are capped at 22 students</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More opportunities for apprenticeship job training</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section Four: Some Background Information

Finally, I would like to ask some personal background information which will help in understanding if some groups of students experience school differently from other groups. It is important to the research to collect this information but please remember, you do not have to answer any question that you are not comfortable with.

26) What was your overall average grade on your last full report card? Circle the number that best represents your grade in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>Overall Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A (80% or above)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B (70 - 79%)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C (60 - 69%)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D (50 - 59%)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E (under 50%)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Grade on Report Card</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t’ Know</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

27) Place a tick [√] next to each of the following possessions you have personally. If you do not have one yourself, but if someone else in your household, then put a tick in that column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possession</th>
<th>Have Personally</th>
<th>Have in my Household</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A computer</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A music centre/CD player</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A pocket cassette/CD player</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A television</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A VCR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An e-mail address</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to the World Wide Web</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A telephone line (i.e., your own number)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An encyclopaedia (print or electronic)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An English dictionary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A French dictionary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A public library card</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A car</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A bicycle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An electronic Game Station</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
28) **What work do your parents (or step-parents/guardians) do?**
   - If you have *both a parent and a step-parent* describe the job of the person with whom you have the closest relationship. If you have *only one parent/guardian* answer just for that person.
   - Describe their jobs as specifically as you can.
   - If a parent is unemployed say that and then describe the last main job s/he had.
   - If a parent’s only job is at home caring for the family, say that.

   **Father/stepfather/guardian’s job:**

   ________________________________

   **Mother/stepmother/guardian’s job:**

   ________________________________

29) **How far did each of your parents/stepparents go in school? Circle the number showing the highest level of education for each parent (or stepparent or guardian).**

   If you have *both a parent and stepparent* answer for the one with whom you have the closest relationship. If you have *only one parent/guardian* answer just for that person.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of schooling</th>
<th>Mother/Stepmother</th>
<th>Father/Stepfather</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some elementary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some high school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some community college</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community college graduate</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some university</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Bachelors degree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University MA, PhD., orProfessional degree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For question 30 if you do not know the answer please write in “Don’t Know”

30) What was the first language that you learned to speak?
________________________

31) Where you born in Canada? Circle the number next to your answer.

1 yes  2 No  3 Don’t Know

32) Do you have any other comments about education and work (or about this questionnaire) that you would like to make?
_________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________

Thank you very much for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire
THE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

[DISTRIBUTED TO PARTICIPATING STUDENTS]

What I want to find out:

- What are your reasons for the educational choices you have made so far, or plan to make it in the future?

- What expectations and aspirations (ambitions, goals) do you have for your future?

- What has it been like for you to enter/exit high school?

- What is your opinion about the value of your education to date? Has it helped (is it helping) prepare you to achieve your future goals? Is it preparing you for the adult world? If so how? If not, why not?

- What opinions do you have about the educational policies and programs you’ve experienced? What do you think about the proposed educational reforms? How have these things affected your experience of school?

- Do you think students, either individually or together, can influence their educational experience in any way?
[INTERVIEWER’S SCHEDULE]

Grade 9:

Interviewer:
Introductions.
Review of research purpose.
Confidentiality.
Audio Recording.

Opening:
How are you finding being in high school?

Is it different from elementary school? How?
What about the work load?
[Possibilities of combining paid work, school work and family responsibilities QR #10]

Future plans and goals?
[Refer to QR items # 11, 12, 6 (any clarifications?)]
On the Questionnaire you say you would choose [names of] courses next year, if you could. Why would you like to take those?

I see you are thinking of a career as a [name]. Do you think it matters what school courses you take for that?

What are your reasons for [whatever] choice?

How do you get the information you need to decide?
Who/what influences you? How?

What is your opinion of the value of your education to this point in time?

What things do you think school gives you that will help you once you are finished high school?

Will they help you achieve your future goals?
In what ways?
Why not?
[Refer to QR # 17 and 18]
How do you feel about the educational policies and programs you have experienced/are experiencing?

Do policies affect how you experience school?
Transition years? [QR# 20-22]
School-level policies? [QR# 16]

Do you think the school program, or changes to it, affect your future in any way? [QR# 24]
What about all this talk of change and reform? [QR# 23]

[If answer is “I don’t think about this”]
How do you manage not to think about it, given everything going on around you?
[try QR # 15 for support re media; #23-25 for how informed]

Does your experience of school affect how you think about yourself? How? Or, why not?

Do you think students can influence their educational experiences in any way?

How? Or, why not?
Have you been able to?
Do you think some students can?
Could a group of students together influence things? How?

At end:
Any report card since the QR? [adjust grade]

Any individual questions or QR clarification required

Thanks and reiteration of feedback promises
Grade12/OAC

Interviewer:
Introductions.
Review of research purpose.
Confidentiality
Audio Recording

Opening
On the questionnaire you said you planned to/are taking [names of] courses. Can you tell me about why you chose those?
[should follow QR# 3/12 ,4 , 11]

[Explore future education career plans]
What are your reasons for those choices?
How do you get the information you need to decide?
Who/what influences you? How?

How do you think it will be finishing high school and moving on to work/post secondary education?

[refer to QR# 6 & 7]
On the questionnaire you said you were concerned about [whatever]. Can you tell me about that?

What things has school given you that have helped prepare you for your move into work/post-secondary education? [QR #18]

What things do you think you might need in the adult world that school has not given you?

How do you feel about the educational policies and programs you have experienced?

Do policies affect how you experience school?
Transition years? [QR# 20-22]
School-level policies? [QR# 16]

Do you think that the school program, or changes to it, affect your future in any way? [QR# 24]
What about all this talk of change and reform? [QR# 23]
[If answer is “I don’t think about this”]
How do you manage not to think about it, given everything going on around you? [try QR # 15 for support re media; #23-25 for how informed]

Does your experience of school affect how you think about yourself? How? Or, why not?

**Do you think students can influence their educational experiences in anyway?**

How? Or, why not?
Have you been able to?
Do you think some students can?
Could a group of students together influence things? How?

At end:

Any report card since the QR? [adjust grade]

Any individual questions or QR clarification required

Thanks and reiteration of feedback promises
APPENDIX D

Interview Coding Themes: Categories and Incidence
### INTERVIEW CODING THEMES: CATEGORIES AND INCIDENCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MAIN THEMES</th>
<th>THEME EXPLANATION</th>
<th>INTERVIEW % (N=58)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>AGENCY PERCEPTIONS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Agency Claims</td>
<td><em>Claims of control over choices, decisions, actions, outcomes</em></td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency in course selection</td>
<td>Own decisions (I decide; chose etc.).</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency in future career choice</td>
<td>Own decision based on interest, preference etc.</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency over social interactions</td>
<td>Creating friendship opportunities; choosing when to go along with peers, parents teachers etc</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency over school experiences/outcomes</td>
<td>Individual can change conditions (e.g., work harder, request course transfer; get extra help etc).</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choosing to be different</td>
<td>Deliberately acting, looking, thinking differently; standing out.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking multiple sources of views/information</td>
<td>Actively seeking various input in order to make decisions, complete school work, attain goals.</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency demand</td>
<td>Should have a say, be listened to, have input, important experience, etc.</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non school</td>
<td>Claims of control over other decisions and choices</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collective Agency</strong></td>
<td><em>What consciousness/faith do students have in the collective as an avenue of change/or resistance?</em></td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of students as a collective</td>
<td>Recognition that students form a specific group that could act together to achieve an outcome.</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible at school level</td>
<td>Collective student action is possible within the individual school</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible at Board level</td>
<td>Collective student action could possibly influence the school board</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible at system level</td>
<td>Collective student action could influence the system at the government level.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td>Never known it, but perhaps if…</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just impossible</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture of competition</td>
<td>Not a collective but individuals in competition</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture of fear</td>
<td>Fear of authority, negative consequences prevents collective action</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School as a community</td>
<td>Change as a result of the school-community-family uniting in action</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students should not have collective agency</td>
<td>Might misuse it, too young, irresponsible</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Agency</td>
<td><em>Student perspectives on the power and social agency of their teachers</em></td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative agent</td>
<td>Statements about power of teachers to be a negative social influence/force (abuser, discourager, etc.)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive agent</td>
<td>Perceptions of teacher as positive influence power, role model, encourager, advisor, etc</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constrained but active agent</td>
<td>Teachers try, but are limited in what they can do by structural rules, social constraints, etc</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indifferent</td>
<td>Teachers don’t care, are burned out, lazy, do nothing (but seen as a choice, not structurally determined)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puppet or dupe of system</td>
<td>Teachers just act as told by higher authorities</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent Agency</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative agent</td>
<td>Parent actions harm/hamper student</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive agent</td>
<td>Parent action helps student, system</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indifferent</td>
<td>Parent doesn’t get involved with school, policy, etc.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action via research</strong></td>
<td><strong>Comments suggesting the research itself achieved at least a minimal action component at the individual level</strong></td>
<td><strong>48</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided an agency opportunity</td>
<td>Great to speak out; Had lots to say; good someone is listening to us, etc.</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action for change</td>
<td>Research like this can bring about change</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doubts that it will achieve structural change</td>
<td>Expressions of doubt re any real change through my project</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions about the research process</td>
<td>My reasons for it; funding; expected outcomes; who took part; who will hear about it, etc</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions about policy changes</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions about my educational experiences</td>
<td>Is university hard; what is a PhD; How is college different from University; You were a drop out, etc</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PERCEPTIONS OF CONSTRAINT</strong></td>
<td><strong>Specific claims about students’ actions/choices being constrained in some way</strong></td>
<td><strong>97</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural (education system specific)</td>
<td>Constraints that stem from way the system of education is organized or delivered (e.g., content, methods, pace, resources, etc..)</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural (non-education specific)</td>
<td>Constraints that arise from structural factors not confined to the education system</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural agent</td>
<td>Constraint arising from actions of an individual system agent (e.g., teacher, GC etc. and also parent acting as system agent)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual (social)</td>
<td>Constraints seen as related to personal circumstances (no friends in class; no access internet, no finances etc.)</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual (ability)</td>
<td>Constraints seen as related to personal ability (academic, social, developmental)</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual (future need)</td>
<td>Constraints concerning what is necessary for future well-being that are not presented critically (i.e., are seen as a free choice)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not having needed information</td>
<td>Statements that ability to chose or act was hampered by lack of information (may also code into one of previous areas)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal freedom constrained</td>
<td>Constraints placed on freedom to chose actions, courses (no smoking, no course choices, not leave school property, etc.)</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treated as non-agent</td>
<td>No say/voice, treated as non-person, inferior, etc.</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromised agency</td>
<td>Choices because it's what others want/expect (&quot;I want because they want&quot;)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FORMS OF RESISTANCE**

| Descriptions/examples of resistant acts to structural or social pressure to conform | 28 |
| Choices counter to peer pressure | Choosing courses that no friend takes; refusing drugs, etc. | 9 |
| Choices counter to individual authority pressure | Going against pressure from parents, teachers | 22 |
| Choices counter to social expectations | Going against the dominant system practice expectation (persisting in school against odds/discouragement; use of alternatives (e.g., correspondence, night school, etc.) | 19 |
| Collective resistant act | such as those described by Everhart (note passing, class-skipping) and walk-outs, petitions etc. | 10 |
| Confrontation of teachers | Directly to the teacher; via complaints to administration | 7 |
| Resistant to Macro structure | Major rule breaking in or out of school (entailing potentially serious penalty) | 2 |

**STRUCTURE-AGENCY NEGOTIATION**

<p>| Statements about negotiating a balance between individual and collective identity; balancing personal desire with structural demands | 55 |
| Individual and peer collective perspectives | own goals versus need to belong to peer group | 10 |
| Individual and authority perspectives | Own wishes versus wish to please/comply with respected authority (parents, teachers) | 14 |
| Individual with social experience/knowledge | Own desires at odds with experiential knowledge of probabilities | 5 |
| Individual determination can overcome structural barriers | Individual hard work and achievement wins out (study, prepare, not give up. | 28 |
| Informal learning | Use of non-formal learning sources to meet (improve chances for) structural (social) expectations. | 22 |
| Strategies to overcome constraints | Plans to finance post-secondary; get needed courses; combine personal interests/desires with structural imperatives | 9 |
| Other negotiations | Miscellaneous examples. | 3 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OFFICIAL DISCOURSE (OD)</th>
<th>Ways in which student discussions contain reference to elements of the official discourse (OD) on education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflections of OD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absorption (unchanged)</td>
<td>the OD is accepted accurately and uncritically (Math, science essential; Post sec necessary; reforms right/needed, etc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absorption (distorted)</td>
<td>the OD is not challenged but is misapplied or reflected inaccurately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debate: doubt expressions</td>
<td>The OD is reflected, but with a query</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debate: practicality challenge</td>
<td>OD is critiqued for being unrealistic, unnecessary, inapplicable, in practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debate: accuracy challenge</td>
<td>OD is critiqued as actually incorrect in some way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debate: outcome critique</td>
<td>OD is challenged on grounds the outcomes will be detrimental in long term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial: rejection</td>
<td>OD is rejected without logical critique—just refusal to accept.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial; knowledge</td>
<td>Don't know/understand what is happening.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiation around OD elements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between OD and personal experience</td>
<td>Attempts to make sense of OD in terms of own experience/preferences and/or reflections on contradictions between these.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Internal OD contradictions</td>
<td>Observation that OD contains contradictions accompanied by attempt to explain or make sense of that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between personal love of learning and formal education</td>
<td>Want to learn, but critical of formal education system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLICY</td>
<td>Students offer considerations of various elements of educational or other social policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy in general</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education – school</td>
<td>In-school rules, policies, curriculum delivery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education – Board</td>
<td>Policies affecting (or attributed to) entire Board area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education – provincial/national</td>
<td>Reference to provincial role in policies; or inter provincial comparisons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education – international</td>
<td>Discussion comparison of other countries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polity</td>
<td>Include government/state and politicians.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass Media</td>
<td>Influence/impact of media content/practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequacy of Education</td>
<td>Discussions of value and adequacy of formal education and social education gained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS formal adequate</td>
<td>Learned what needed for the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS formal inadequate</td>
<td>Does not provide/prepare for future; what taught not useful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of HS social education</td>
<td>Teaches social skills needed in life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inflexible/non-creative</td>
<td>adequacy limited or detrimental because of inflexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers need training</td>
<td>Inadequately trained teachers detrimental to adequacy of education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transition Years</strong></td>
<td>Discussions of the transition into High school and of the TY program specifically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition into HS positive experience</td>
<td>Like HS; better than elementary; more friends; choices, treated better, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition to HS negative experience</td>
<td>Frightening, intimidating, hard, not prepared.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TY program educationally helpful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TY program educationally negative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TY program socially helpful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TY program socially negative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS demands more self-responsibility</td>
<td>Statements about this (regardless of positive, negative, neutral perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching Practices</strong></td>
<td>Discussions of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive practices</td>
<td>Teaching prior to evaluation Providing extra help/reviewing Peer assistance methods Mutual respect to control Explain and apply Caring/relating to students Open-minded/flexible Knowing subject well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative practices</td>
<td>Not teaching (rote learning, dictation, not explaining. Homework not yet taught) Disallowing creativity Use of fear to control (mean, scream) Inflexible approach Disinterest/not caring about students Inconsistent standards Lack of knowledge/clarity Not understanding students' social contexts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONTEXT OF RISK</strong></td>
<td>Notions of risk reflected in the students’ discussions as something experienced or observed as present in the school context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At risk from Youth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- self</td>
<td>Self-noted poor choices, dangerous behaviour, lack of ability, stamina.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- other youth</td>
<td>Experience of violence, harassment, negative peer pressure, low expectations (self or friends).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At risk from adults</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- family</td>
<td>Self–experienced physical, emotional, lack of social/educational capital, low expectations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- teachers &amp; GCs/staff</td>
<td>Self–experienced abusive practices, (include witnessing abuse/meanness directed at other S) poor quality, low expectations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- others with power</td>
<td>Employers, government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational risk</td>
<td>Concerns about the following articulated by the student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- failing courses</td>
<td>High school or post-secondary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- dropping out</td>
<td>High school only.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- failing to get PS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- wrong life choice</td>
<td>Mistakes about courses now, Post secondary courses, career, other life areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Lack of information</td>
<td>Specific statement of detriment to decisions because of not having needed information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- too much work</td>
<td>Other work (paid and family, will conflict with educational success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Action of structure</td>
<td>Strikes, work to rule of structural agents endangers student outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social risk of staying in school</td>
<td>Risk of staying in over dropping out of school (this time code mentions the existence of these risk factors.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social isolation</td>
<td>No friends to turn to; isolated/ignored by peers for any reason; and choices that lead to or risk isolation from peers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target of peer violence or humiliation</td>
<td>Physical violence; bullying; verbal attacks; being picked on (teased etc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target of adult violence or humiliation</td>
<td>As above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure of personal secrets</td>
<td>Family poverty (wrong job, clothes, neighbourhood), family violence, substance abuse, illness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>School causing emotional or physical health problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediation of Risk</td>
<td>The very social agent: acts to negotiate and reduce risks/increase chances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balancing educational and social risk</td>
<td>Gain and maintain friends and grades; grades and work; offset educational boredom with social.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of available social capital to reduce educational risk</td>
<td>Use of friends or family members (or their resources) to reduce chances of failure, make sound choices, cope with bullying, mean teachers, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of educational capital to reduce social risk</td>
<td>Getting good grades to improve future status; trading academic help for friendship, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiating School Politics</td>
<td>Finding a ‘safe’ peer group (supportive friends); Avoiding being target of gossip/ridicule.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximize range of options</td>
<td>Specific statements that reduces risks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employ denial approach</td>
<td>Specific statements about doing this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Culture of Violence/prejudice</strong></td>
<td>References to the cultural context of violence and discrimination.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School shootings (Site 4 only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapons in school (Site 4 =7%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global conflicts (Site 4 = 10%)</td>
<td>Wars, global dangers of all kinds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unequal treatment (all the ‘isms’)</td>
<td>Prejudice; disrespect for difference; Risks that attach to a social status</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>