THE PRACTICAL PARADIGM: CHILDREN'S

PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL

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Submitted to the Faculty of the
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Oklahoma State University
In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
December, 1987

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude
to the many individuals who contributed to this research
project and to my professional growth during my studies at
Oklahoma State University. I am especially thankful to the
members of my dissertation committee, Dr. J. Randall
Koetting, Dr. Kathyrn Castle, and Dr. Kenneth St. Clair, for
their guidance and assistance. I am indebted to my thesis
adviser, Dr. Russell Dobson, for his guidance, assistance,
encouragement and patience. Dr. Dobson, a scholar,
intellect and friend, epotimizes the essence of a mentor.
He gave me confidence, support and the benefit of his
expertise and experiences.

Appreciation is also extended to Dr. Ann Hickman, Vice
President for Academic Affairs and Research and Mrs. Kay
Porter, Secretary for the Department of Occupational and
Adult Education. Dr. Hickman, Chair of the 1985-86 Minority
Lectureship Screening Committee, continued beyond her duties
and offered support and encouragement during my stay at
Oklahoma State University. Mrs. Porter rendered invaluable
services during the completion of this research project.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of Study

Four years ago the National Council on Excellence in
Education published <u>A Nation at Risk</u> (1983). This report
disclosed a variety of dissatisfactions with education and
issued an immediate call for educational reform.
Nationwide, state legislators responded by creating task
forces and charging them with the responsibility of
effecting educational change. As a result, the nation's
schools are now seeking improvement through more than thirty
major educational reforms (Cross, 1987; Odden & Odden,
1984). Education reformers are advocating improvement
through popular and yet controversial measures such as merit
pay, master teacher plans, the Holmes group and the Carnegie
Forum proposals for teacher training. Additionally, some
educators are hoping to find amelioration through tight
controls and increased minimal standards. Still others are
accepting "quick fix" mechanistic solutions imposed by
well-meaning distant reformers and state officials. An
urgent demand for educational improvement persists (Cross,
1984; Cross, 1987).

Heckman, Oakes, & Sirotnik (1983) maintained that if we are truly to improve education, we must look within the actual school for the solutions to the problems that exist. The first step is to know what the problems are. Then, we must seek an understanding of these problems. Finally, we must decide upon an appropriate course of action. The school culture--its activities, organizational arrangement, behavior patterns, underlying assumptions and beliefs of the people within the school--provides a useful perspective from which to receive this knowledge and understanding.

Few researchers, however, are looking within the school for the solutions to and an understanding of the problems facing education. Typically, schools are viewed by researchers who are distant outsiders and who neither know nor understand what is happening in the school. Often these outsiders assign meanings to school events and recommend changes that reflect their views and beliefs, incompatible with the views and beliefs of those persons inside the school. As a consequence, inappropriate actions and meaningless changes are happening. In this flurry of activity, the child's perceptions of "what school is all about" are being ignored (Rogers, 1984). Sirotnik and Oakes (1981) commented: "As we all know, nearly every school has closets full of corpses--the no-longer-used machinery and materials of hastily implemented solutions that, for some reason, didn't work" (p. 166). Knowledge obtained from within the actual school site about the needs of the

learners and the condition of that school may help to limit such inappropriate action.

Ignoring the child's perceptions of school has led to two major consequences. First, a failure to solicit the child's perception of school has prevented a full understanding of the child at school. The child brings and develops a unique set of experiences, perceptions, beliefs and values to the classroom each day. These variables, in interaction with the events of school, constitute a personal school reality for the child. An awareness, understanding, and acceptance of the child's reality is necessary if we are to help the child release whatever potential strengths he or she has (Synder, Synder, & Synder, 1980).

Second, by failing to solicit the child's perceptions, educators have been denied access to an important resource basic to change. Knowing how the child feels and thinks about school and schooling may help to clarify problems existing within the actual school site. This knowledge may also provide a practical basis for action and change.

Permeating this study are two beliefs: (1) Children and their perceptions may be used as resources in helping educators to understand both the child at school and school phenomena and (2) student deliberation, a methodological alternative for viewing school, is a feasible and appropriate approach to discovering and solving school problems. Goodlad (1984) remarked: "If we can only understand schools clearly in our minds, we might be more

successful in improving them" (p. 9). Children may help us to gain this understanding and through discourse and problem-solving strategies, children may also help to effect school change.

Purpose of the Study

Sometimes educators do not understand the child at school because they do not know what the child sees, thinks, believes, or feels. The primary purpose of this study was an attempt to describe children's perceptions of a school.

Rogers (1984) reported that "Finding out what is really going on in the minds of children as they go through the process of schooling is unquestionably one of our most difficult and neglected tasks" (p. 5). There is an enormous amount of available test data dealing with the outcomes of schools but very little information about what lies beneath the surface of children's test responses. A movement in this direction, according to Rogers (1984), is long overdue.

A secondary purpose of this study was to present an alternative for studying schools. Hunter (1984) pointed out there are many ways of knowing and that ways of knowing lead to ways of doing. Student deliberation, the alternative presented in this study, is one way of "looking at" and "knowing about" school. Knowledge about the school emerges and evolves from the perceptions and deliberations of those individuals within the setting.

Rationale for the Study

Schools are constantly undergoing review, renewal, and change in an effort to improve curriculum and instructional programs. If we are to make significant changes and if we are to achieve the efficacy and amelioration constantly being sought, then we must look beyond the sweeping generalizations which have evolved from current summative educational research and look at actual schools and classrooms. Even more important, we must see the school and the classroom from the perspective of those within the school culture. Viewing school from a cultural perspective and acquiring and understanding the perceptions and viewpoints of the people within the school setting can bring about effective school change which may ultimately lead to school improvement.

Culture is both a group's way of doing things and the means by which people make sense of their setting (Heckman et al., 1983). Freire (1970) illustrated these premises as he taught many of Brazil's poor and illiterate adults to read. Freire was successful in his efforts because he understood the Brazilian's culture and the realities and meanings that the Brazilians brought to the events that were a part of their everyday lives. Freire had to probe deeply within the Brazilian culture to understand the meaning of events in the lives of his students. He then used this understanding as a basis for his teaching. Similarly, this

study probed within the school culture in an effort to understand the meanings which children assign to school. Recommendations for school change evolved from these meanings.

Freire (1970) ignored conventional assumptions about the Brazilians and operated from the perspective of Brazilian culture. In contrast, educators, researchers, and organizational theorists often disregard the perspective of culture when viewing school. There is a tendency to think of schools as goal-oriented factories engaged in processing human materials. As Sirotnik & Oakes (1981) succinctly stated: "In go the raw materials (uneducated children) and out come the products (learned citizens)" (p. 165). Standardized test scores are frequently relied upon as the only assessment of these "products." Little or no attention is given to the particular structures, behaviors, meanings, and belief systems that have evolved in the school (Heckman et al., 1983).

Sirotnik & Oakes (1981) argued that "Anyone intimately familiar with school knows that the schooling process defies analogy with the factory model" (p. 165). Instead, schools are complex social organizations. Consequently, a simplistic input/output approach to studying school and for improving the quality of school life is too limited to be the only evaluative tool. Alternative research tools are needed. Eisner (1979) stated:

To complement these methods of evaluation,
evaluators must look to the qualities that pervade
classrooms, the experience that students have in
schools, and the character of the work that
children produce. To see these qualities requires
a perceptive eye, an ability to employ theory to
understand what is seen, and an understanding of
educational values so that an appraisal of the
educational significance of what has been seen can
be determined (p. xiii).

A research approach that allows this perceptive look is
"qualitative research." Qualitative research is described
by Rist (1978) as the direct observation of human activity
and an ongoing and natural interaction with those within the
research setting. This approach is an effective research
tool because it can provide a deep, complex understanding of
school. Information comes from many sources. Structured
and unstructured interviews, observations, personal
documents, autobiographies, personal letters, newsletters,
notes sent home, yearbooks, and students records are a few
of these sources. This information is presented in a rich
literary quality which gives the reader data that is in the
form of words or pictures instead of numbers.

In recent years there has been a movement toward using
qualitative methods to gather children's perceptions of
school and schooling. Many of the types of data collected,
however, provide a peripheral and superficial view of
school. Rarely have student perceptions about school been
used to help educators plan curriculum improvements.
Gathering, describing and using children's perceptions to
interpret the school culture, therefore, have a very

substantial effect yet to be realized on classrooms and schools (Weinstein, 1982).

I have established two needs for this study. First, there is a need to know and understand the child at school. Second, there is a need to receive inside knowledge about school that will allow us to understand the school's conditions and to suggest solutions to the problems relevant to the culture. Most changes in educational practice have preceded, instead of followed the findings of educational research. If educational research is to be more useful and if it is to impact educational reform then this trend must be reversed.

A conceptual framework (paradigm) that reverses this trend is practical curriculum inquiry (Schwab, 1970; Schwab, 1978a; Schwab, 1978b; Schwab, 1983). Practical curriculum inquiry is a workable, useful, everyday method of study based on the interaction among the persons and the cultural and historical circumstances of the curriculum setting being studied. Ragan and Shepherd (1971) view the school curriculum as including "all the experiences of children for which the school accepts responsibility" (p. 3). The researcher and participants, immersed in the curriculum setting, search for meaning and understanding of curriculum problems by studying the situation and interpreting its meanings. Decisions reached as a result of practical inquiry can serve as a guide for possible action and necessary school change (Schwab, 1970; Schubert, 1986).

According to Schubert (1986), four assumptions undergirding the practical paradigm are:

1. The source of problems is found is a <u>state of affairs</u>, not in the abstract conjuring of researchers who tend to imagine similarities among situations that cannot be grouped together defensibly.

2. The method of practical curriculum inquiry is <u>interaction</u> with the state of affairs to be studied, rather than detached induction upon it and deduction about it.

3. The subject matter sought in the process of practical curriculum inquiry is <u>situational insight and understanding</u>, instead of lawlike generalizations that extend across a wide range of situations.

4. The end of practical curriculum inquiry is <u>increased capacity to act morally and effectively</u> in pedagogical situations, not primarily the generation of generalized, publishable knowledge (p. 289).

Researchers who adhere to these assumptions (a) focus on a particular educational setting, (b) search for insights into situationally specific problems through interaction with the actual educational setting being studied, and (c) increase the capacity for effective and moral decisions, direction, and meaning (Schubert, 1986).

The aim of the practical researcher is not only to seek knowledge, but to generate action as well. Similarly, this study sought to know how children perceive school and its problems and to generate recommendations for possible action and school change. Seeing curriculum problems as practical problems that can only be solved by those with inside knowledge of the curriculum setting leads to educational

reform which may be implemented effectively and purposefully
(Reid, 1979).

We have moved forward to a wider view of research
methods in education during the past decade. Still, if we
plan to use research to inform educational practice then we
must continue to build up educational research tools and to
build conceptual apparatus and research methods unique to
education (Eisner, 1979). Viewing school through the
perceptions of children and using student deliberations as a
means of interpreting what we see are steps in this
direction.

Basic Assumptions

Six basic assumptions undergird this study. They are:

1. The significant perceptions that the individual
child builds and maintains about objects, people, symbols,
events, and ideas all work together in a reciprocal fashion
to help build "reality" for the child.

2. An awareness of the child's reality and the manner
in which the school responds to this reality contribute to
the child's feelings about his/her total self, ultimately
culminating in a productive school experience.

3. It is possible to gain insight into a child's
reality through deliberation.

4. Research is important to the improvement of
educational practice. Educational practice is complex and
subtle; research methods, to be useful, must therefore

include alternative research approaches appropriate for the understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

5. The most effective way to study a given phenomenon is through direct on-site contact and interactions with the individuals within the culture being studied. On-site observations may reveal subtleties and additional meanings which would not be apparent through scientific measurement, test scores, or questionnaires.

6. Reciprocity, the act of involving the subjects themselves in the research, makes the research potentially more significant.

Organization of the Study

This study has six chapters. Following the present introductory chapter, Chapter II presents the literature which supports this study. The areas discussed are: (1) perception, (2) deliberation and the practical paradigm and (3) qualitative methods. Chapter III includes a description of the research procedures used to collect data. Chapter IV presents the data gathered during this study. Chapter V presents the children's version of that data. Finally, Chapter VI presents the interpretations, implications, and recommendations which evolved from this study.

Summary

Much of what happens in schools today is based on that aspect of knowledge that we have termed "conventional wisdom." The changes that schools usually try are prepackaged innovations added onto schools as they currently function. These changes are sometimes incompatible with what is needed within individual schools.

Educators and researchers are becoming more and more interested in the processes which lead to action and change in schools. They are also interested in the interactions, patterns of behaviors and perceptions of children as they try to understand schools better. Viewing school from a cultural perspective may bring the insight needed to effect appropriate change and to increase chances of creating curriculum and instructional programs that accommodate children's growth.

Goodlad (1983) stated:

My interest is, has been, and will continue to
be improving education, especially in schools.
I am interested in understanding schools so that
others and I might use whatever insight is
gained in order to improve schools. Any measure
of success one has in improving something
depends heavily on understanding it (p. 8).

This quote by Goodlad captures the spirit of this study. Those who are interested in educational inquiry are beginning to explore alternative research frameworks and approaches. They are turning away from a near exclusive reliance on quantitative research methods as the only

acceptable means by which to analyze, describe and interpret the realities of education. One of the basic premises underlying this shift is there are multiple ways of "knowing," and no one method can answer all our questions or offer all the necessary perspectives Popkewitz, 1981).

This study offers "one more way of knowing."

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Historically, the study of schooling has been dominated
by a simplistic methodological model based on a cause-effect
relationship between student school behavior and academic
performance. This "traditional" model, based on the work of
a generation of curriculum theorists, has successfully
facilitated a reductionist perspective of education which
deals with particulars removed from the whole. On the other
hand, this <u>dominant</u> approach has failed to provide an
interpretive understanding of school and to reflect upon the
meanings, feelings and realities that school holds for
participants in the setting. It has also neglected to
acknowledge or raise basic questions about prevailing
values, beliefs and perceptions. Furthermore, it has
ignored situational problems and issues (Giroux, 1981;
Sirotnik & Oakes, 1981).

In Chapter One I provided a rationale for the importance
of seeking children's perceptions about school. I also
argued for a departure from the traditional technocratic
framework of "viewing" school and suggested instead the use
of qualitative methodological approaches and student
deliberation (a process by which children identify and

deliberate school problems and then suggest a plan of
action) as alternatives. I believe that this course of
action may lead to a clearer understanding of and a better
chance for improving curriculum and instructional programs.
Three areas of the literature that support these notions
are: (a) perception, (b) the practical paradigm, and
(c) qualitative methods. The discussion of perception
substantiates the value of knowing children's perceptions of
school and illustrates the significance which this knowledge
holds in the understanding of school itself. The discussion
of the practical paradigm builds an understanding of a
useful, workable, and sensible framework for studying
school. Finally, the section on qualitative methods
provides a brief historical overview and description of the
qualitative research approach.

<p align="center">Perception</p>

Perception, a dynamic and ongoing process (Berman,
1968), has several diverse meanings. Russell (1956) defined
perception as "the process of organizing and interpreting
the sensations the organism receives from external and
internal stimuli" (p.70). Berman (1968) described
perception as "a human function in which a transaction is
made between the perceiver and the person, object,
situation, or ideas being perceived" (p. 30). Combs and
Snygg (1959) referred to perception as being the
individual's point of view. Matson simply stated that

perception is "the act of noticing" (cited in Berman, 1968,
p. 27). This variety of references suggests that perception
is a difficult and elusive phenomenon to describe and
underscores the significance that everyday sensations and
transactions have in forming an individual's point of view.

Perceiving occurs as the result of the individual's
interaction with external and internal stimuli. External
stimuli (sight, taste, smell, touch and sound) are
transmitted by the sense organs to the brain.
Traces of these impressions are retained in the brain and
become a world of imagination and memory. These sensory
experiences connect the individual and the world
(Adler, 1946; Combs & Snygg, 1959). Internal stimuli
include beliefs, values, feelings, hopes, desires and
personal ways in which people see themselves and other
people (Combs, Avila and Purkey, 1978). These stimuli build
personal meaning for the individual.

This complex world of personal meanings and sensory
experiences create a frame of reference which Combs and
Snygg (1959) called the "perceptual field."
Combs and Snygg (1959) stated:

> By the perceptual field, we mean the entire
> universe, including himself, as it is
> experienced by the individual at the instant of
> action. It is each individual's personal and
> unique field of awareness, the field of
> perception responsible for his every behavior
> (p.20).

An individual builds and maintains many perceptions.
Some are clearly differentiated, while others are so vague

and undifferentiated that the person is unaware that they exist (Combs, Richards, and Richards, 1976). Combs and Snygg (1959) believed that the individual's use of consistent and repeatable perceptions as frames of reference is done so "smoothly and naturally" that the individual does not even realize that it is happening.

The significant perceptions that the individual builds and maintains about objects, people, symbols, events, and ideas all work together to help build "reality" for the individual. This reality, according to another's perception, may contain much error and illusion. It seems to be an interpretation of reality instead of reality itself. To each individual, however, his perceptual field is reality (Combs, et al., 1976).

Allport (1964) warned against assuming that another individual's perception is faulty. Sensory and cognitive experiences and processes are developed well enough to provide accurate perceptions; therefore, what people feel and believe to be true and real cannot be ignored. Dismissing conceptions of reality as "distortion" and "failure to perceive reality" hinders the possibility of understanding others.

Elkind (1978) believed that the child's reality is different from that of adults. This belief was shown through Elkind's effort to understand how the child builds reality out of his or her experiences with the environment. Elkind's research evolved from an interpretation, extension,

and refinement of Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive
development. Piaget's theory of perceptual development,
according to Elkind (1978), assumed that perceptual reality
is neither genetic nor copied from the environment but is
actively, developmentally, and continuously constructed by
the child because of his or her interactions with the
environment.

Behavior, like reality, is also a product of how people
see themselves and the situations they are involved in. In
an identical physical situation the perceptions of different
persons will differ. Each individual will interact with or
respond to the situation in terms of what it means to him at
that instant. Behavior, therefore, is determined by the
individual's perceptual field and not a set of objective
facts. "All behavior, without exception, is completely
determined by, and pertinent to the perceptual field of the
behaving organism" (Combs and Snygg, 1959, p. 20).

At the core of an individual's response to situations is
the individual's perceptions of "self." According to Combs
et al. (1978), situations change from moment to moment or
place to place, yet the beliefs that people have about
themselves are always present. "The self is the star of
every performance, the central figure in every act" (Combs,
et al. 1978, p.17). Similarly, Rogers (1951) felt that
most behavior is consistent with the concept of self.
Dobson, Dobson & Koetting, (1985) also believed that
children's experience is filtered through and mediated by

their concepts of self. Self-concept serves as a mediator of perceptions, thoughts, and action; therefore, the images that children have formed from significant other people are extremely important (Dobson et al. 1985).

The views presented in this brief review substantiate the belief that perception is an extremely important process. Children bring different perceptions to the classroom setting. An awareness of these perceptions helps educators to know the realities of children and consequently to plan more effectively in efforts to meet their needs and to create curriculum and instruction programs that accommodate their needs (Berman, 1968).

> How persons perceive, what they perceive, and why they perceive as they do are factors that should receive major attention if the school is to help develop persons who see the world with its richness, variety, and charm, and who are able to perceive with a minimum of distortion (Berman, 1968, p. 26).

Children's Perception of School

There has been an increasing interest in the student's view of classroom life in recent years. The primary areas of study have included the following: (a) the teacher and teacher behavior, (b) peers and peer behavior, (c) other school personnel, (d) the self in school, (e) the cause of behavior in school, and (f) the classroom and the school (Weinstein 1982).

Weinstein (1982) concluded from her search of literature on student perception that children are actively and

constantly interpreting classroom events and drawing
inferences about what they see. Children's inferences and
views of classroom events are sometimes inconsistent with
adults' views of classroom happenings. Yet, these
inferences and views constitute reality for children and are
helpful, informative and essential to a clearer
understanding of classroom phenomena.

A perusal of literature suggests relationships among
children's perceptions of themselves, children's perceptions
of teacher feelings and teacher behaviors and student
achievement and classroom behavior. This conclusion is
supported in the investigations of Davidson and Lang (1965),
Eash and Waxman's (1980), and Benninga, Guskey and Thornburg
(1981). Davidson and Lang (1965) found a positive and
significant correlation between (a) children's self
perception, (b) academic achievement, and (c) desirable
classroom behavior and children's perception of their
teachers' feelings toward them. They also found that
children in the upper and middle social class groups
perceived their teachers' feelings toward them to be more
favorable than did children in the lower social class group.
Finally, they found that girls generally perceived their
teachers' feelings to be more favorable than boys.

In a similar study, Eash and Waxman (1980) studied the
relationship of students' perceptions of their teachers'
behaviors and students' achievement. This investigation

indicated that students' perceptions of certain identified teachers' behaviors--variabllllty, enthusiasm and interest, task orientation, criticism, multiple levels of questions, and mismanagement--affected students' achievement. It was concluded, therefore, from this investigation that (a) student achievement is influenced by children's perceptions of teacher behaviors and that (b) teacher behaviors are related to student achievement and success.

Another study investigating the relationship of students' perceptions of teacher attitude and teacher behavior was conducted by Benninga et al. (1981). This study showed that teacher attitude and behavior influence students' perceptions of the teacher. It was found, for example, that teachers who exercised greater control over their students and who felt less responsible for the positive learning outcomes of their students were perceived by their students more negatively than those teachers who felt less need to control and who felt more personal responsiblllty for the positive learning outcomes of their students. It may be determined from this study that a significant relationship exists between teacher attitude, teacher behavior, students' perceptions of teacher attitudes and teacher behavior and the behavior and attitude of students. Hamachek (1978) maintained that people tend to behave in a manner which is consistent with what they believe to be true. Teachers, therefore, need to understand the influence that their behavior and attitude

have on student behavior and attitude and be willing to change these inappropriate behaviors and attitudes.

Teachers need observational systems and ways of monitoring their behaviors and attitudes if they are to change behaviors and attitudes. Whitfield and Galloway (1970) developed a classroom observational system based on the perceptions of three hundred sixty sixth graders. Adjective descriptors were taken from the results of student questionnaires and interviews and were clustered into a twelve category observational system. Perceptual statements were randomly selected from this system and were given to a panel of judges for sorting into still another category. Finally, observers were trained to use this system to observe classrooms.

Whitfield and Galloway (1970) admitted that training adults to use the observational system did not assure that adults would be able to interpret teacher behavior from the same perceptual base that a student experiences. Still, Whitfield and Galloway (1970) felt that a valid and reliable category could be developed by using student perceptions of their teacher as a source of data. Whitfield and Galloway (1970) also found that students do perceive very subtle teacher behaviors and can report their perceptions with a richness of language all their own.

In a more recent study, Mergendoller and Packer (1985) explicated categorically descriptive terms used by seventh graders to characterize teachers. Mergendoller and Packer

(1985) Interpreted these terms and developed a framework
which provided a useful view of students' conceptions of
teachers. They found that the students' perceptions were
not merely descriptive, but expressed likes, dislikes,
fears, accomplishments, frustrations, and their expectations
of how an effective, successful, and likable teacher should
act. Mergendoller and Packer (1985) felt that this
awareness would enable teachers to understand problems
better.

A knowledge of children's perceptions and thoughts about
peers and peer behavior is as important as children's
perceptions about teachers and teacher behavior. Weinstein
(1982) reported, however, that few studies have been done
concerning student perceptions and thoughts about peers and
peer behavior. Sociometric choices have been extensively
studied in the classroom, but children's underlying thinking
about peers remain relatively unexplored.

Two studies which did investigate children's thoughts
about their peers were conducted by Filby and Barnett (1982)
and Moely and Johnson (1985). Filby and Barnett (1982), in
examining the perceptions of elementary students regarding
which students were "better readers" in the classroom,
discovered that elementary students learned early to compare
and evaluate the performances of their peers and of
themselves. Similarly, Moely and Johnson (1985) observed
second, fourth, and sixth grade children and found that
these children showed increasing accuracy in judging reading

skills and mathematics ability of their peers. Moely and
Johnson (1985) also found a moderate correspondence between
sixth grade students and teachers in the ranking of student
popularity.

Student perceptions of the specific processes and
practices of schools have also been assessed. Some examples   .
of these investigations are studies about: (a) school marks
(Boehm & White, 1967), (b) decision making (Wolfson & Nash,
1968) and (c) punishment (Bloomer, 1968). These authors
believed that their research has value in helping the
educator to understand the child at school.

How reliable are children's perceptions of classroom
phenomena? Bailey and Robertson (1982) showed in their
study of kindergarten children's perceptions of the
classroom that even young students can provide substantial,
usable and reliable information about the classroom if an
appropriate student feedback instrument is used. This
feedback instrument must be commensurate with the student's
intellectual, emotional and communication skills. A
positive environment which allows the student to be
honest, objective and secure is also necessary.

On the other hand, Clements, Gainey, and Malitz (1980)
found contrariety in the accuracy of students' perceptions
of themselves and their classroom performance. These
inconsistencies were between students' self-rated ability
and ability level of reading groups. They did find,
however, that the students in their study did accurately

perceive differential treatment by the teacher and organizational and management strategies. They also maintained that knowledge of the perceptions of the student is critical if we are to understand the classroom process.

Brophy (1982), even less optimistic about the accuracy of student perception, questioned the meaningfulness of student data. He concluded through his review of the literature that student perceptions seem to be determined more by children's stages of development, instead of events happening in the classroom. He acknowledged that there is some value in children's perceptions but cautioned that we must interpret their responses instead of accepting them at face value. He added: "Some are purely fanciful, and others are accurate as far as they go but do not have the same meanings or connotations they would have if made by adults" (p. 521).

I think Brophy (1982) has understated the value of children's perceptions. Children's perceptions and adult perceptions are often not synonymous. Still, children's perceptions are accurate, reliable and important (Weinstein, 1982). I believe that a student's perceptions represents reality as the student sees it and that this reality is meaningful and significant. Being aware of children's reality is essential if we are to understand children and help children.

This literature review substantiates the importance of being aware of children's perceptions in understanding

children. Still, Weinstein (1982) encouraged more
systematic knowledge about student perceptions and realities
of schooling. She urged educators to learn from student's
perceptions. Investigations and inquiries of student
perceptions, such as reviewed in this chapter, contribute
greatly toward an understanding of children at school.

The Practical Paradigm

A paradigm is "a loosely connected set of ideas, values,
and rules that governs the conduct of inquiry, the ways in
which data are interpreted, and the way the world may be
viewed" (Schubert, 1986, p. 170). There is a range
of educational paradigms or frameworks being used to study
schools and schooling. Traditional orientations have been
based on the rational, scientific, and procedural approach
of early curriculum theorists such as Franklin Bobbitt and
Ralph Tyler. This approach has concentrated on "what" we
see as we look at schools and "what" the curriculum should
be like.

This rationale has been successful, straightforward, and
clear in addressing the steps that should be followed in
curriculum planning. It has also been useful in
categorizing the elements of a curriculum problem. However,
it has not addressed "how" curriculum inquiry should proceed
nor has it provided an avenue for possible courses of action
to alleviate curriculum problems (Reid, 1979;
Schubert, 1986).

This concern has led Schwab (1970), Walker (1981), Westbury and Steimer (1971) to believe that this tradition has failed to advance education. Schwab (1970) expressed dissatisfaction in his legendary statement: "The field of curriculum is moribund. It is unable, by its present methods and principles, to continue its work and contribute significantly to the advancement of education" (p. 1). Schwab (1970) insisted that the curriculum field would make little progress unless it turned away from theoretical pursuits aimed at generating knowledge, and focus its attention on practical curriculum problems requiring answers, choices and actions. Schwab (1970), Walker (1981), Westbury and Steimer (1971) are joined by Fox (1985); Harris (1986); Orpwood (1985); Pereira (1984); Reid (1979); and Roby (1985) in advocating a shift from the dominant technical behavioristic paradigm to an action based paradigm labeled "practical inquiry."

Practical inquiry, which was conceived by Schwab and refined by others, concentrates on the practical concerns of the curriculum (Harris, 1986; Reid, 1979; Walker, 1981; Westbury and Steimer, 1971). It may defined as a framework of inquiry which centers on everyday problem solving and searches for meaning and understanding of actual problems found within the curriculum situation (Schubert, 1986). Schwab (1970) argued that curriculum problems are practical problems. Curriculum problems, according to Schwab (1970), are neither theoretical nor scientific in nature. Instead,

curriculum problems are practical problems about choice,
about action, and about what is to be done.

Reid (1979), agreeing with Schwab, maintained that
practical problems are a regular part of everyday life.
Taking his lead from David Gauthier, Reid (1979) proposed
that, generally speaking, curriculum problems are most
closely related to a class of questions referred to as
"uncertain practical questions." Reid (1979) said:

> A review of curriculum problems suggests that
> they have all the characteristics of uncertain
> practical [everyday, realistic] problems. First
> they pose questions that have to be answered.
> Second, the grounds on which we have to make
> decisions are unsure. . . . Existing resources,
> expertise, and expectations have to be taken
> into account . . . we have to make
> decisions relative to a unique context . . . .
> We have a problem about conflicting aims and how
> to adjudicate between them . . . the outcome
> will be to a degree, unpredictable. Finally,
> the justification of an act of teaching lies not
> in the act itself, but in the desired ends we
> intend to achieve by it
> (p. 192).

Schwab (1970) insisted that curriculum problems should
be addressed by a method appropriate to issues of action and
choice. One method by which we solve most practical
everyday problems, according to Reid (1979), is called
"practical reasoning" or "deliberation." Reid (1979)
described deliberation as: "an intricate and skilled
intellectual and social process whereby, individually or
collectively, we identify the questions to which we must
respond, establish grounds for deciding answers, and then
choose among the available solutions" (p. 189).

Harris (1986) associated the term "practical" with action. Harris (1986), consistent with the views of Reid (1979) and Schwab (1970), considered deliberation to be the process which leads to action. Deliberation, Harris (1986) asserted, involves weighing and examining the reasons for and against a measure and giving attentive consideration and mature reflection to choices and actions. Sometimes, however, as Reid (1979) pointed out, the action may be to decide to not to take any action at all. Despite the action taken and unlike theoretic inquiries which do not demand an answer, questions of a practical nature are asked and answered.

Schwab (1970) described the process of deliberation as being complex and laborious and neither deductive or inductive. Expounding, Schwab (1970) stated that deliberation cannot be inductive because the target of deliberation is a decision about action in a concrete situation, instead of a generalization or explanation. On the other hand, deliberation cannot be deductive because it deals with concrete cases and not abstractions from cases.

Schwab (1983) proposed that curriculum deliberation occur at the local school site with a curriculum group composed of the principal, representatives from the community, teachers and students. Heading this group would be a chairperson, skilled in the process of deliberation. The mission of this group, according to Schwab (1983) would

be to investigate and deliberate the status of the
commonplaces of teachers, learners, subject matter and
milieu (educational environment).

Deliberation is operationalized through the practical
arts of perception, problemation, prescription, and
commitment. In Schwab's approach the arts of perception
enable the participants to list and describe the symptoms
which indicate something is wrong in an actual state of
affairs. The arts of problemation allow the participants to
make a diagnosis of what is going wrong and why and to
formulate the problem which will need attention. The arts
of prescription are the means by which resources and
constraints are inventoried and a plan of action to resolve
problems is generated. The arts of commitment allow for the
consideration of probable outcomes of proposed solutions and
eventually, lead to the decision of when to end deliberation
and to act (Schwab, 1970, 1978a).

Curriculum problems originate in a situation which is
felt to be functioning improperly. The arts of perception
bring meaning and insight to the details of a problem
situation (Schwab 1983). Pereira (1984), taking a closer
look at the arts of perception, reported that identifying
the symptoms which show that something is wrong and
describing all the rich, variable, and specific details are
the first steps of deliberation. The arts of perception,
therefore, enable one to see and make use of the
particularities of practical situations Harris (1986).

Schwab (1978b) identified other arts by which one
generates alternative solutions and decides upon the best
one.

> There are of course, additional practical
> arts. . . arts for weighing the alternative
> formulations of a problem. . . for choosing one
> to follow further. . . arts for generating
> alternative possible solutions to the
> problems. . . arts for tracing each alternative
> solution to its probable consequences, arts for
> weighing and choosing among them. There are
> also reflexive arts for determining when the
> deliberation should be terminated and action
> taken (p. 326).

Roby (1985) and Pereira (1984) maintained that the
practical arts can be enhanced in curriculum deliberation by
factoring in the four commonplaces: teacher, learner,
subject matter and milieu during the problem identification
phase and in succeeding phases of deliberation. Roby (1985)
suggested that the specification of the four commonplaces
turns the "commonplaces" into the "particular" places needed
for deliberation.

Each task described in the preceding paragraphs is
associated with an identifiable product (e.g. a list of
symptoms, a description, a diagnosis, a stated problem, an
inventory, a plan of action, a written review) which may be
written down and arranged into a coherent argument for the
action to be taken.

A variety of authors, tracing their ideas of practical
deliberation to Schwab's Aristotelian conception of inquiry
(realistic instead of idealistic thinking), have focused on
various dimensions of deliberation and have suggested a

variety of approaches and descriptions for understanding and conducting curriculum deliberation (Harris, 1986; Pereira, (1984); Orpwood, 1985; Walker, 1981). Harris (1986) and Pereira (1984) believed that although these studies are difficult to organize, studies about curriculum deliberation are needed. This review of literature of the practical paradigm concludes with a synopsis of several such studies and experiences.

Walker's (1971) "naturalistic model" was constructed to represent phenomena and problems observed in actual curriculum problems. Walker's model consists of three elements: (a) the curriculum's platform (the system of beliefs and values of curriculum planners), (b) the deliberation (the decision-making process) and (c) its design (the result of the decision-making process). This empirical model allows a "naturalistic" approach to curriculum planning. In contrast to the traditional model, Walker's analysis focused not on what should happen in the planning process but on what does happen.

Pereira (cited in Roby, 1985) illustrated the process of deliberation to a group of experienced teachers in the following example.

> First, there is an unstructured phase in
> which the teacher invites each student to
> explain what bothers her or him in a problematic
> situation, probes for the various aspects of it,
> and encourages the other members of the class to
> act as resource persons . . . .The second phase
> is more structured. Using an available model of
> deliberation, the teacher systematically helps
> the students to locate problems and solutions

for formulation among the commonplaces of
curriculum deliberation, students, teachers,
subject matters, and milleux (p. 25).

Orpwood's (1985) case study of curriculum policymaking
in which he and a colleague were involved as
participant-observers in a curriculum committee deliberating
over a new science program for their Ontario school board is
another example of curriculum deliberation. Orpwood's
analysis of his experience yielded two stages of
deliberation. During the first stage of deliberation,
contributions (facts, principles, specific proposals) are
collected and tested for their relevance. Those
contributions which seemed to be relevant become
considerations and received further deliberation. The
second stage consists of weighing considerations to
determine final conclusions. Orpwood's delineation of these
deliberative stages provides both a process model and a
framework for analyzing school problems (Orpwood, 1985).

In contrast to an approach to curriculum development
that begins with the search for objectives, practical
inquiry begins with the search for "the problem." Fox
(1985) indicated that one characteristic of the practical is
that the problem is not given but must be located or
discovered. The process of the formulation of the problem,
the examination of the problem, and the generation of
alternative responses is an invitation to educational
researchers, educators, students, parents, and board members
to contribute to the solutions of school problems through

their backgrounds of perception, understanding, and knowledge.

Qualitative Methods

Behavioral science research methods dominated educational research in the late 1950's and throughout the 1960's. These quantitative methods have yielded many successes and have been important in describing some aspect of educational life and its consequences (Eisner, 1978). Still, according to Eisner (1978), quantitative methods are far too limited to be the exclusive or even dominant set of methods. Eisner (1978) said:

> A new climate appears to be developing in the
> field of educational evaluation, one that could
> have significant consequences for the ways in
> which inquiry into educational problems is
> conceived. I am referring here to the growing
> interest in the use of the qualitative methods
> and nonscientific approaches to the study and
> evaluation of educational practice (p. xi).

Eisner (1979), Goodlad (1983), Heckman, Oakes, & Sirotnik (1983), and Willis (1978) have all shown a growing interest in the use of qualitative methods and approaches to the study of school and schooling.

Similarly, Popewitz (1981) reported that those who are interested in educational inquiry are turning away from a near exclusive reliance on quantitative research methods as the only acceptable means by which to analyze and interpret the realities of education. According to Popewitz (1981), one of the basic premises undergirding this shift is there

are multiple ways of "knowing" and no one method can answer

all the questions or offer all of the necessary

perspectives.

Walker (1981) believed that educators and researchers

have relied on quantitative research methods as the "proper"

model of research because of the following misconceptions

commonly made by educators and researchers.

1. Educators and researchers have thought that studies

should include "overt behaviors" only and that research

must be entirely a matter of verification and proof.

2. Educators and researchers have believed that human

judgments are unreliable and therefore, undesirable for

empirical research.

3. Empirical research has meant searching for isolated

causes or cause-effect relations.

4. Researchers have felt that it was necessary to

control the phenomena, in order to ensure scientific study.

5. Researchers have believed that they should study

only one small thing at a time.

Walker (1981) urged researchers and educators who are in

the business of studying schools to reverse research trends

of the past and to develop a stronger commitment to

empirical inquiry (inquiry based on observations and

practical experiences instead of theory) as a means of

dealing with professional affairs.

According to Eisner (1978), there is plenty of room and

legitimization in education for both the scientific

approaches used in quantitative research and the artistic
approaches used in qualitative methods. What is needed,
however, are more attempts to use qualitative approaches to
inform educators about current school practices.

Qualitative research had its beginning in the late
1800's. In 1890, photographer Jacob Ries reviewed the lives
of the urban poor in his book How the Other Half Lives.
Frederich LePlay studied working-class families through a
method social scientists in the late 1800's labeled
"participant observation." Qualitative research did not
advance, however, until the 1960's (Bodgan, 1982). Rogers
(1984) claimed that the turbulent 60's acted as a catalyst
to stimulate interest in qualitative research in education.
This period brought national attention to educational
problems. Social upheaval and change, focused upon the
experiences minority children were having in school, caused
concern. It became apparent that school people did not know
enough about how students experienced school. People wanted
to know what schools were like for children who were not
"making it" and many educators wanted to tell them. Some
researchers such as Jackson (1968) wanted to start at the
beginning to observe daily life at schools. These kinds of
concerns increased an interest in qualitative research
(Bogdan, 1982).

Although the interest for qualitative research grew
steadily in the 1960's, it was still not yet firmly
established as a legitimate research paradigm. Graduate

students who chose to study a problem from this perspective

faced major hurdles as the methodological debates between

quantitative and qualitative researchers raged (Bogdan,

1982). Eisner (1978) reported that the use of qualitative

methods in educational evaluation is still in its infancy.

Very few schools of education, for example, offered courses

on qualitative methods to graduate students and there were

no schools or departments of education whose variety of

courses in methods of qualitative inquiry approximated the

number offered in quantitative methods.

Rogers (1984) believed that although the movement to

qualitative methods has been very slow, a movement of

qualitative methods is certain. Doctoral research at

schools and colleges of education is no longer narrowly

quantitative in nature.

> More important, the strident conflict between
> qualitative and quantitative researchers has
> softened. People are talking to each other,
> listening to each other, accepting the need and
> desirability of both approaches, and recognizing
> that if we are to answer questions as
> fundamental as "do schools educate?" we shall
> have to make intelligent and sensitive use of
> all the tools at our disposal (Rogers, 1984, p.
> 105).

Rist (1978) defined qualitative research as direct

observation of human activity and interaction in an ongoing,

naturalistic fashion. Rist (1978) went beyond this simple

definition to list the following as features of qualitative

research:

> 1. Qualitative research has the natural
>   setting as the direct source of data and

the researcher is the key instrument.
2. Qualitative research is descriptive.
3. Qualitative researchers are concerned with process rather than simply with outcomes or products.
4. Qualitative researchers tend to analyze their data inductively.
5. "Meaning" is of essential concern to the qualitative approach (pp. 27-31). [Meaning is essential because it represents reality. Brophy (1982) underestimated the significant role which individual meaning and reality play in helping the researcher to understand the phenomenon which is being studied.]

Rist (1978) pointed out that not all qualitative studies will exhibit all these features with equal potency and that some studies may be completely void of one or more of these features.

McCutcheon (1982) outlined eight different common forms of qualitative research methods. Those forms in this study are: (a) autobiography which depicts the effect of curricular activities upon the individual; (b) case study which documents and shows how a curriculum is reinterpreted in its use in varied settings; (c) educational criticism which gathers evidence about a curriculum and presents a curriculum in use through description, interpretation and appraisal and (d) ethnography which documents and shows the nature of a "lived culture."

Ethnography stems from sociological, psychological and anthropological roots. Rist (1978) defined ethnography as the attempt to describe a culture or aspects of that culture with "thick description." Strategies represent the world view of the participants being studied. These strategies

are empirical, naturalistic, and holistic (Wilson, 1977).

Although ethnography is sometimes criticized for its

obscurity of purpose and its lax relationship between

concepts, observation, conceptual structure and theory, it

has become a "household word" in professional education

(Spindler, 1982).

Spindler (1982) contended that the following criteria

predispose "good" school ethnographies: (a) Hypotheses and

questions for study emerge as the study proceeds in the

setting chosen, (b) The participant's view is brought out

by inferences from observations, interviews, and other

eliciting procedures (questionnaires should be used

cautiously), (c) Interviews and other forms of ethnographic

inquiry are generated in the field and as natuarally as

possible without influence or predetermined responses by the

inquirer, and (d) Any form of technical device such as

cameras, audiotapes, and videotapes that will enable the

ethnographer to collect more live data should be used.

Questions are raised about the use of ethnographic data

for scientific generalization, policy formation and decision

making. Ethnographers feel that an in-depth study that

gives accurate knowledge of one setting not markedly

different from similar settings is likely to be

substantially generalizable. Ethnographers also feel that

it is better to have in-depth, accurate knowledge of one

setting than superficial and possibly skewed or misleading

information about isolated relationships in many settings

(Spindler, 1982).

In sum, qualitative educational researchers are concerned with the internal life of school--what is really occurring in classrooms, corridors, cafeterias, and playgrounds. The task of the ethnographer, therefore, is to see the subtleties and nuances of events as they really are (Rogers, 1984).

Summary

In this chapter I have explored (a) "perception"--a mode through which the world may be viewed, (b) deliberation and practical inquiry"--a processing paradigm dependent upon the arts of perception and finally, (c) "qualitative methods"--research tools which will enable researchers to use children's perceptions as a lens to bring about a better understanding of school and schooling.

Heckman et al. (1983) maintained: "If we want to improve education, we must look at schools from the inside" (p. 26). Studying schools in this manner, seeking an understanding of the child's reality at school and involving children in deliberative action may help to clarify problems existing within the actual school site and increase the chances of school improvement.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Children's perceptions of school are essential if we are
to understand school from the child's point of view.
Typically, however, we have ignored the child's point of
view and have neglected to utilize an important resource of
understanding. The primary purpose of this study was to
look at school through the eyes of children. Viewing school
through the lenses of children and their perceptions calls
for research methodology that departs from traditional
research approaches common to education.

The assumptions and rationale underlying this study and
the fact that children play an important and reciprocal role
in the research process did not lend themselves to
measurement, scientific solutions, predictability or
standardized outcomes. For these reasons, qualitative
methods and procedures were chosen.

These methods included ethnographic techniques of
qualitative methods and deliberation, a process of practical
inquiry. The multimodal features of ethnography
(autobiographies, interviews, "thick description" and
ongoing participant observations) allowed me to use a
variety of techniques for describing and interpreting

41

children's perceptions of school realistically,

holistically and empirically. Deliberation, a process for

formulating, discussing and interpreting a variety of

perceptions, problems, and solutions (Pereira, 1984),

permitted me gain insight and an understanding of children's

perceptions and to verify my interpretations of these

perceptions. This chapter discusses these methods and the

procedures.

Participants

Qualitative researchers oft-times involve the subjects

themselves in the research. The researcher may also become

a participant in the research. In this research study, both

the researcher and the subjects were involved in the

research process. This notion of reciprocity makes the

research findings significant and meaningful (Rogers, 1984).

Subjects

Forty-three of the fifty-one sixth grade students

enrolled in the research setting volunteered to write

autobiographies about their perceptions of school. I chose

eighteen children from this pool of volunteers to be

interviewed. The subjects chosen in this sampling included:

(a) children who expressed an interest in participating in

the research procedure, (b) children from low, middle and

high socio-economic levels, (c) children with good and poor

conduct histories, and (d) children with high and low

scholastic achievements. All children were required to obtain parental permission. As a result of using these criteria, eight girls and ten boys were chosen. The racial composition of the interviewees included: four Black Americans, two Asian Americans and twelve Caucasians. This blend of diverse backgrounds and motivations gave me a variety of perceptual perspectives.

Eight of the eighteen children, because of conflicts in the children's activities and research schedules and a loss of interest, decided to discontinue their participation in the research project after the interviews. Each of the remaining ten children agreed to assume the role of student researcher and to become a part of a student research team. The ten volunteers who assumed the role of student researchers were asked to deliberate current school problems.

The last phase of the research procedure consisted of obtaining a written description and interpretation of the research process from the children. Three children from the student research team volunteered (on the basis of their interest and availability) to review the research data and then to give their account of the research findings. These three children completed the research procedure.

Sixth grade students were used for several reasons. First, most children at this age, according to Elkind's account of Piaget's formal operational period, are able to comprehend historical time and geographical space, to

construct ideals, to grasp contrary-to-fact conditions, and
to conceptualize and to think about their own thinking.
They have become reflective and contemplative (Elkind,
1978). Second, most sixth year students have developed the
communication and inferential skills, commitment and
dedication which the project demanded. Third, eleven and
twelve year old children generally have developed sufficient
verbal and intellectual skills so that self-report
procedures can be used productively. Gage (1977) stated:

> Student's ratings can be regarded as a feasible
> approach to teacher change but only under certain
> conditions. For one thing, the pupils must be
> mature enough to make usable and reliable ratings;
> the fifth or sixth grade is probably the lower
> limit in this sense (p.52).

Principal Researcher

I assumed the role of participant observer through out
this research procedure. A participant observer is an
observer who actually becomes a part of the situation to be
observed (Gay, 1976). My responsibilities as participant
observer included: (a) interviewing individual children,
(b) conducting group interviews, (c) facilitating students
deliberations, (d) summarizing and interpreting the data,
and finally, (e) making recommendations based on the
research findings.

Setting

The setting used in this study was an open space
elementary school in Southwest Oklahoma. The three hundred

and seventy students who attended this school were organized
in kindergarten through sixth grade classes. There were two
sixth grade classes in this organization. These two classes
were used in this study.

The average length of attendance for students in this
school was three years. Forty percent of the students in
the two sixth grade classes had attended this school three
to six years, the remaining sixty percent had attended this
school seven months to three years. This mobility, due to
the military base and industry, brought a variety of
perspectives about school and school experiences to the
research setting.

Research Design

Descriptive research methods and procedures were used to
collect the data in this study. Descriptive research is
designed to determine and to report the way things are. It
involves collecting data to answer questions concerning the
current status of subjects, settings, and situations.

The many different types of descriptive studies are
generally categorized in terms of how data is collected,
self-reports and observation. Self-reports include: (a)
surveys, (b) autobiographies, (c) sociometric studies, (d)
questionnaries, and (e) interviews. Observations include:
(a) nonparticipant observations (naturalistic observation,
simulation observation, case studies, and content analysis),

(b) participant observations and (c) ethnography (Borg, 1963; Gay, 1981).

The research design used in this study included the use of self-reports and ethnographic tools. Each of these approaches (autobiographies, individual and group interviews, and participant observations) will be discussed on pages

Borg (1963) reported that descriptive studies provide the researcher with a starting point. The data yielded through the descriptive approaches used in this study were starting points for student deliberations about school problems and recommendations for school change.

Research Methods and Procedures

This project was conducted in three phases. During the first phase, I collected children's perceptions of school through children's autobiographies and individual and group interviews.

The second phase consisted of student deliberations. Children, using their perceptions as a base, (a) discussed school, (b) listed problems which were currently happening within the school setting, (c) singled out one specific problem which needed immediate attention and, then (d) developed a plan of action for the specified problem.

During the last phase, children wrote an account of the research findings and experience. This account is found in Chapter V. Ongoing participant observations occurred

throughout the research experience. Ethnographic techniques and deliberation were used to gain children's perceptions of schooling and these perceptions were used to view and study the school.

Autobiographies

The first step taken during the research procedure was to ask sixth year children to write autobiographies of school. Autobiographies, rich in detail and written to tell the person's own story as he or she experiences it, resemble fiction. They range from the intimate and personal to the superficial and trivial and can be an introduction to the world the ethnographic researcher wishes to study (Rist, 1978).

The content of autobiographies is reclaimed by a reflective process that allows the mind to wander. Many important clues into the basic meanings which form the individual's perceptual field come into view. Interests and biases of the autobiographer are revealed. Some events are selected while others are excluded; some feelings are acknowledged while others are repudiated. Still, this information pulls the past into the present and provides a critical reflection upon the educational experience (Grumet, 1981).

Procedure. I asked volunteers from two sixth grade classes to write autobiographies about their school

experiences and how they felt about these experiences. I suggested eight broad and general topics for children to consider when writing. This topics were given to stimulate the children's thinking (A sample is found in Appendix A). Since children's reality was important to this project, children were cautioned not to limit their thinking to these topics. Instead, they were encouraged to let their thoughts flow freely and to remember as many school experiences as possible.

Summary. Children's autobiographies about school were used in this research project (a) as an introduction to children's perceptions of schooling, (b) as a source for probing into and exploring of children's perceptions of schooling and (c) as a basis for children's deliberation of schooling. Examples of the autobiographies are found in Appendix B.

Interviews

The second step in this research procedure was to conduct a series of individual and group interviews. The best way to know what a person thinks is to ask him. Although asking a person what he thinks may not yield a totally valid answer (sometimes the individual responds the way he thinks he is expected to respond), it is an excellent way to tap into the individual's inner thoughts and feelings (Brandt, 1981 & Cottrell, 1986). Brandt (1981) remarked:

"Talking is perhaps man's greatest single activity" (p. 167). Conversations and interviews, then, become major behavior settings for studies of human functioning (Brandt, 1981).

The qualitative researcher uses the interview as a primary tool for collecting data. The interview, structured according to the purposes of the interviewer, is designed to elicit the precise information needed (Brandt, 1981). It may be either closed-ended or open-ended. The advantage of the interview over other data collecting methods is that it allows the interviewer to probe for further comments, clarification, and explanation of statements. In addition, respondents usually speak more easily than they write.

Interviews vary from completely informal encounters to highly structured sessions (Wilcox, 1982). The types of interviews used in this study were both the open-ended interview which Rist (1978) advocated, and the structured and nonstructured interviews recommended by Brandt (1981).

The disadvantage in using the interview approach is that interviews, particularly open-ended interviews, take tremendous amounts of time to transcribe, code and analyze (Hamilton, 1980). Rist (1978) suggested that the interviewer limit the interview's length. He further suggested that the interviewer choose a reasonable number of subjects and that the time spent in each interview should make sense in terms of the work involved in transcribing it. He pointed out that a one-hour interview, when typed, amounts to twenty to

forty typewritten pages of data. Hundreds of hours or great expense can be spent on transcribing interviews at this rate.

Procedure. The students and I used five different types of interviews during this research procedure. I developed and conducted the first three types of interviews. This series of interviews included: eighteen individual interviews, eighteen follow-up interviews, and three group interviews. These interviews allowed the children to clarify, to explain and to extend their autobiographies and previous interviews. The student researchers structured and conducted the other two interviews.

For the first interview, the individual interview, I structured the basic questions and the sequence of these questions from each autobiography. Approximately twenty interview questions were asked during the twenty minute interview. Each interview was especially designed for the individual autobiographer. The purpose of the first interview was to allow the children an opportunity to clarify, extend and explain their autobiographies. Questions and directions such as: "What do you mean by. . . ?" and "Explain," and "Tell me more," were used frequently through out these interviews. I also exercised the freedom to probe nondirectively, for example: "What makes you think . . . ?" "Why do you think . . . ?" "Can you give me an illustration?" These types of questions gave the

children an opportunity to extend their thoughts.

Each of the eighteen students returned for a second interview. Our first step during this segment was to listen to a taped-transcription of the first interview. Interview questions were then structured according to my need for clarification and the students' need to expand and explain comments made during the first interview. This interview consisted of approximately eight questions and was more brief than the first interview. Examples of these questions included: "Does that happen often?" "How does that make you feel?" and "What do you think can be done?"

The next set of interviews was held with the same group of eighteen children. Each group interview lasted approximately thirty minutes. The group interview was another technique used to clarify, expand and double-check the first interview responses. The group was asked leading questions such as: "How did you feel when . . . ?" "What do children mean when . . . ?" Do you all agree with . . . ?" "Who is in support of . . .?"

The ten children who volunteered as student researchers conducted the fourth and fifth interview sessions. During the fourth interview, the students read the autobiography of one other student, structured approximately four interview questions and then conducted the ten minute interview.

The fifth interview was also conducted by the members of the student research team. Small groups of children, rotating the leadership role, interviewed each other about

data which evolved during the previous interview experiences.

Summary. The primary purpose in using these interviews was to explore children's perceptions of the everyday conventions of schooling and to obtain data that represented children's perceived reality. Inserting the proper questions at appropriate places produced relevant data.

Some nonstructured open-ended interview questions were used throughout the interviews to determine the subjective effect of the school experience. Sample questions were: "What is one thing that you would change about school?" and "What things would you like to study about in school?" The primary feature of this type of interview is codification. Once data are classified in some systematic fashion, comments can then be examined and categorized according to the group's or interviewer's wishes (Brandt, 1981). This procedure was followed as the students categorized data during the student deliberations. (Excerpts from sample interviews are found in Appendix C.)

Participant Observations

Participant observation, the primary technique used by ethnographers to gain access to data, was ongoing through out this research experience. In participant observation, the investigator tries to elicit his/her subject's definitions of reality by living as much as possible with

the subjects being studied (sometimes even unnoticed) and
taking part in the subject's daily activities (LeCompte &
Goetz, 1984). Fine and Glasser (1979) pointed out, however
that: "LIKE THE WHITE RESEARCHER in black society, the male
researcher studying women (or vice versa), or the
ethnologist observing a distant tribal culture, there is no
way in which the adult participant observer who attempts to
understand a children's culture can pass unnoticed as a
member of that group" (p. 153). The adult, therefore, must
assume roles notably different from the traditional
ethnographic situation in which the assumption is that one's
research subjects are equal or at least treated as equal.
Roles available to the adult observer when an explicit
authority relationship is absent include: (a) the _friend
role_, (b) the _observer role_, and (c) the _supervisor role_.
The _leader role_ is an option available for the adult
observer who is invested with authority and who has positive
contact with the children being observed. The adult may
wish, however, to remain in the background as much as
possible (Fine and Glasser, 1979). Fine and Glasser (1979)
found that children rapidly come to accept a researcher who
shows respect for them by explaining why he is observing
them and making them aware of the adult's role and research
interest.

Procedure. I assumed the _leader role_ during the
participant observations of this project. My

responsibilities during the writing of the autobiographies, the interviewing process, student deliberations, and the writing of the student account were to facilitate and monitor the experience.

Summary. Although written and spoken data were the focal points of this research experience ongoing observations were important. These observations provided the descriptive data in Chapter IV and a broader perspective for the interpretations and recommendations found in Chapter VI.

The Process of Deliberation

The second phase of this research project consisted of student deliberation. Student deliberation was a practical process which enabled the students to identify, describe, diagnose, and act in response to everyday school problems (Schwab, 1978). This process was adapted from the process of deliberation as advocated by Fox (1985); Harris (1986); Orpwood (1985); Pereira (1984); Reid (1979); Schwab (1970); Walker (1981) and Westbury and Steimer (1971). A discussion of the process was presented on pages 28-34.

Procedure. The ten children who formed the student research team participated in the student deliberations. Five sessions of deliberations were held. During the first session, the student research team (a) was introduced to the process and procedures of deliberations, (b) reviewed the

data from the interviews, (c) identified and listed school problems which surfaced during the interviews, and classified these problems under the categories of learner, teacher, subject, and milleu.

In the second session, the student research team reviewed and clarified the categories and problems listed in Session One.

During the third session, the student researchers continued to discuss the symptoms and problems listed in Session One. Each student independently selected and justified his or her selection of one of the problem which the group listed in Session One. After deliberation, the group selected one problem which they deemed to be most eminent. An understanding of this problem was refined in Session Four.

Then, in Session Five, the student research team developed a plan of action designed to reduce or eliminate the problem identified and refined in Sessions Three and Four. (Excerpts from a deliberation session are found in the Appendix D.)

Summary. Insight obtained from student deliberations served three basic functions in this research project. First, the information brought an extended view of the problems which existed at school. Second, student deliberations provided a means for interpreting student's perceptions about the events which happen at school. Third,

the insight gained from student deliberations offered a plan of action which may eventually improve an existing problem--a problem which has an effect on successful interpersonal relationships of children at school.

Children's Written Account of

of the Research Experience

During the final phase of this research project, three children from the research team volunteered to write an account of the research experience. This strategy offered another perspective from which to view children's perception of school.

Procedure. First, the authors of the children's account of the research reviewed written summaries, observations and audio-taped excerpts of the group interviews. Second, the authors agreed to organize their data under the categories: learner, teacher, subject, and milieu. Then, the authors used an audio cassette recorder to spontaneously record their story of the research experience. I transcribed and edited this account.

CHAPTER IV

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This chapter contains an description of my research

experiences and a summary of the data. Several qualitative

methodological techniques were used to gather data. They

were: ongoing observations, autobiographies, a variety of

interviews, and deliberation. On-going observations were

recorded throughout the research experience and were used to

write the ethnographic description. Autobiographies and

interviews were used to collect children's perceptions.

Deliberation, advocated by Orpwood (1985); Pereira (1985);

Ried (1981); Schwab (1978); and Walker (1971) was used as a

problem-solving strategy and for reciprocity to validate my

interpretations. These techniques led to the an

understanding of how these children felt about school and

what they perceived as problems and solutions.

Description of Research Experiences

A hush fell over the two classes as forty-three of the

fifty-one sixth-grade students wrote autobiographies about

how they felt about school. The forty-three children who

had volunteered to share their perceptions of school

appeared to be very interested in their task. Most of the children began to write immediately and continued to write furiously for about thirty minutes. Other children finished in about ten minutes. Still others did not start for ten minutes or more. Some children, upon completing their stories, read their stories over; others hastily put their pencils away; two students put their heads on their desks; the others looked idly around the room.

All the children knew that some of the volunteers would be interviewed about how they felt about school and that their autobiographies would be used as the source for these interviews. They also knew that later, the interviewees would have an opportunity to volunteer as "student researchers." This knowledge brought about responses of both enthusiasm and indifference. One student responded: "I would really like to help with this project."

Another student said: "Being a researcher sounds like fun, I would like to work with this project."

Still another student simply replied, "I do not want to help, I hate to write."

The autobiographies varied from four sentences to four full handwritten pages. The children had been encouraged to think about specific such things as: (a) the people who work in school, (b) the things that they did in school, (c) the boys and girls who attended schools and (d) the things that they liked and disliked about school. The children were told to think of their school experiences from

kindergarten to the present time and were urged to let their thoughts flow freely. They were reminded that the purpose of this first step was to write as openly and as honestly as possible about how they viewed school and how they felt about their viewpoints.

The series of individual interviews followed this experience. These interviews, consisting of questions developed directly from the children's individual autobiographies, allowed the children to extend, clarify, validate, and corroborate their autobiographies. This opportunity also allowed me (through open-ended questioning) to probe more deeply into the children's revelations and meanings.

Eighteen children were interviewed. Most of the children appeared relaxed and excited about the interview and responded boldly and fluently to the interview questions. Several children, however, seemed tense and anxious. One girl sat on the edge of her chair and continued to move her hands nervously in her lap. Another boy's voice was barely audible and he had to be reminded to speak louder so that his voice would register on the cassette recorder. Generally, though, all the children seemed interested, sincere, and serious.

The second interviews were more brief than the first interviews. The children read transcriptions of the first interviews and listened to recorded excerpts. Occasionally, I would stop the recorder to clarify any information that

was unclear. Except the girl described in the preceding paragraph, the children seemed even more at ease during the second interviews. This girl remained tense, would not make eye contact, and continued to display nervousness and shyness. She had written about how the children had not accepted her and how she hoped to gain just "one friend" at her new school. Pain etched her face as she told about her experiences with children who were unkind.

Other interviews were conducted by the children. By this time, because of conflicts in activities and loss of interest, eight children had decided to discontinue their participation in the project. The remaining ten children, armed with the autobiography and transcript of one other student interviewed that student. The children developed their own interview questions and wrote the responses instead of recording them on the cassette as I had done. Children also held group interviews. Additional interview quesitons were asked by members of the research team. (An excerpt from the student conducted group interview is found in Appendix B.) I was not present during any of the interviews but could hear much giggling in the background. This giggling suggested that the children were very relaxed and were enjoying the experience.

These interviews began the second phase of this research project. This phase, consisting of about fifteen hours of student deliberations, involved (in addition to the student-conducted interviews) several problem-solving

skills. The children, now called "the student research team" reviewed data, identified and listed problems, argued their positions, made decisions, and developed a plan of action. The children felt a strong sense of responsibility and accomplishment as they went about their tasks. One student expressed this sentiment: "It was fun being a student researcher. We think that more children should be asked about school. We have our own ideas about school, whereas adults have theirs. Maybe our ideas can help adults."

Everyone on the research team was asked to participate in the last phase of this study--a written account of the research experience. Three of the ten children had made prior commitments and could not continue with this project. Four of the children were not interested in continuing the project. The other three children seemed excited about completing the research project.

First, the children and I discussed a procedure for facilitating this phase. One student suggested writing individual stories. Another student suggested selecting one student to record (in writing) while the other two dictated the story. After some consideration, these ideas were discarded because the children felt both would be too laborious. Finally, the children decided to outline the data and to record, spontaneously, a story about the research experience on audio-cassette. I was elected to transcribe the cassette recording.

Presentation of Data

The data in this study are organized according to the four commonplaces of school: the learner, teacher, subject and milieu, as suggested by Schwab (1970). The learner, teacher, subject and milieu interact and continuously influence one another and are considered by Schwab (1978) to be the very essence of school.

Learners

Sixty percent of the children in this story wrote about the learner at school in their autobiographies. Children defined the learner at school as a student, a peer, or a friend. The terms "learner," "student," and "peer," were all used synonymously. The designation "friend," however, had a special meaning. Children used the term "friend" when they talked about a relationship which was based on intimacy, trust, honesty, caring, and sharing.

Everyone liked their friends and valued friendships. Friendships meant people to be with, to think with, to share with, and to talk with. Friendships also provided support groups for the children and created for children a sense of belonging. Many of the children said that they liked being with their friends and that they thought of school as a meeting place for friends. Children described their friends as being: (a) "super people," (b) "someone who is great to

be with," (c) "someone who can be trusted," and (d) "someone who is lots of fun."

On the other hand, only a few children made positive comments about peers who were not considered as friends. These few children, recounting a kind deed done by another student, simply described some classmates as being nice. "Nice" children were defined as children who did not aggravate, tease, harass or abuse other children. "Nice" children were also described as children who were kind to teachers and caring about school.

Most children were very critical and negative toward their peers. They perceived their peers as being arrogant, mean, rude, bossy, and trouble-makers. Several children admitted that they liked some of their peers and disliked others. "Some of the kids are great, but not all of them," wrote one boy.

One of the girls wrote, "There are a couple of people that I just can't hardly stand but they probably can't stand me either."

Still another girl remarked, "I like some of the kids, but some I can't stand."

The major concern of the children was the manner in which they perceived being treated by their peers. Children were accused, repeatedly, of being mean. Several children stated that school would be a much better place if the children were not so mean. One girl reported that children did not want to stand by her in line and often "picked" on

her by calling her names. She mentioned that she felt <u>bad</u>
when this happened. Another boy said that he liked everyone
in school except one boy who sometimes told lies on him and
kicked him when the teacher was not watching.

The children who labeled their peers as bossy reported
that some boys and girls seem to "act like the head person
of the school." One girl stated that students often became
victims of verbal and physical abuse if they did not follow
the directions of abusive students. Another student
remarked, "I think that the boys and girls at school should
be responsible for just themselves and not the other boys
and girls."

The possibility of fights, both verbal and physical, was
clearly the most serious concern confronting the children.
Fights were caused by: (a) name-calling, (b) harassment, (c)
prejudicial thoughts and acts, (d) disrespect of the rights
of others, (e) spreading rumors and lies about each other,
and (f) bad attitudes. Harassment, disrespect and bad
attitudes manifested themselves through launching spit wads,
tripping, pushing, and dirty looks.

The most frequent type of fight was the verbal fight.
Verbal fights often led to physical fights. One student
remarked: "Most students, including myself and my friends,
have a strong battle of words and sometimes that causes
fights. I do not like to fight in any way, and I get scared
in a fight. We need stricter rules against the problems
that cause fights."

Children who were perceived as being popular set the standard for the other children. Popular children were persistently self-confident, dressed fashionably, and played sports well. Many children admitted emulating and envying children who were thought of as popular.

The children also had definite opinions about the learner in an academic sense. They felt that the learner should be allowed to make more choices in school, especially in the selections of subjects and the activities that they participated in. One student remarked: "We're the people that have to come to school and study and take the subjects you want us to take. I think that for once teachers should let us make up our own minds and stop making them up for us."

Some learners were considered as "learners with problems." The children assumed that children who copied assignments from their classmates and who talked and disrupted class also had problems learning. The children felt that students would be more successful if they tried harder and listened more carefully. Peer tutoring was recommended as a solution for helping children who were not experiencing success.

Children knew that learning was happening at school. This knowledge was based on (a) the grades that were awarded, (b) comments sometimes overheard in the classroom such as: "I never knew that," and (c) the enthusiasm and

interest that was shown during class both by teachers and learners.

The children also felt that the learner should (a) do better in school, (b) listen more carefully, and (c) take better care of the equipment and school building. One student remarked: "We need to clean up when we mess things up. We also need to clean up things even if these things belong to someone else. If someone else leaves something around--just pick it up for the school." Finally, children believed that the teachers felt good about the learner and that teachers liked students better than the students liked themselves.

<u>Teachers</u>

Twenty-nine of the forty-three children commented about teachers in their autobiographies. Children's perceptions of teachers varied as reflected in the following exemplary sentences: (a) "I like school because of my teachers, they are nice and they don't give you homework every day. (b) "I do not like school because of some of my teachers, teachers are mean." (c) "I feel good in school when teachers say nice things about me." (d) "I feel bad when my teacher yells at me for not having my homework," and (e) "I like school when my teachers are happy. Happy teachers make me happy."

Forty-eight percent of the twenty-nine students

characterized teachers as <u>nice</u>, <u>fun</u>, <u>helpful</u>, and <u>friendly</u>.
Most of the children simply said that their teachers were
"nice." Others made more precise statements such as: (a)
"I like my teachers because they are friendly and they
really care about teaching"; (b) "The thing I like best
about school is the teachers, they don't give you
homework every day"; (c) "Teachers are nice, if you need
help just ask the teacher and the teacher will help you";
and (d) "My teachers give me warm feelings about school."

During the interviews, it was discovered that "nice
teachers" were perceived as teachers who (a) helped children
when they did not understand their assignments, (b) cared
about their students, (c) let children do their work over
so that they can make better grades, (d) were friendly and
kind, (e) let children play games in class, (f) provided
free time for their students, and (g) made children feel
good about being in school.

The children revealed several ways in which nice
teachers are compensated. "Nice teachers make nicer boys
and girls," claimed one student.

Another student observed, "Students tend to be more
attentive for teachers who have nice personalities. When
teachers are too serious then kids tend to be a little
afraid."

Still another student said, "Nice teachers make you want
to learn."

The students acknowledged that children sometimes took advantage of nice teachers by not doing their assignments or by being disrespectful. Consequently, the children felt that many teachers were afraid to be "too nice" and would react in a mean and angry manner instead.

The types of teachers that the children liked best were: (a) teachers who were fun, (b) teachers who told neat stories, (c) teachers who made work interesting and fun, and (d) teachers who cared. These kinds of teachers made children feel comfortable and accepted in school. These teachers also made school interesting and caused children to be enthusiastic about their work.

Several children emphasized that the type of teacher that they preferred most was the "strict teacher." The strict teacher, unlike the nice teacher who was described as "sometimes too lenient," was characterized as firm and consistent. The strict teacher set forth rules and enforced them. The students knew what to expect and performed accordingly most of the time. One girl stated that her grades and attitude about school improved when she had "strict teachers." She said, "I used to not like school because my teachers were not strict. They did not get mad or anything if I did not turn papers in. I like school best when it is strict and the teachers help me. School is good for me and I know it."

Although the degrees of strictness were not established, one student did caution against excessive strictness. "If

teachers are too strict," he warned, "kids will rebel just to see how far they can go." This student went on to suggest tempering strictness with the characteristics of niceness.

Children spoke appreciatively of teachers who were: (a) fair, (b) enthusiastic, and (c) patient. Teachers with these characteristics were perceived to be ideal teachers. The teacher who was perceived as fair was not expected to have favorites or teacher's pets. Teachers' pets (usually smart girls) ran the errands, were called on more frequently, received the teacher's compliments and made the better grades. Teachers' pets were resented and sometimes shunned by the group. Still, children vied to become the teacher's pet by raising their hands frequently, bringing the teacher small gifts, writing notes to the teacher, drawing pictures for the teacher, and trying to please the teacher. The children believed that most teachers have favorites.

The concept of prejudice surfaced as the children discussed "fairness" during the group interviews. The children felt that teachers sometimes singled out black students for admonishment during a group offense. This act was perceived not only as being unfair but as being prejudicial as well. Perceptions of prejudice were not limited to differences in race and nationality. Children felt that teachers who treated children differently because

of appearance, mannerisms, habits, and past academic and
behavior records, were also prejudiced and unfair.

Teachers who the children perceived to be enthusiastic
helped their students to be enthusiastic. Enthusiastic
teachers, according to the children, were "lively and full
of joy." The children criticized teachers who resorted to
lecture or reading from the text as their major mode of
subject delivery. They also criticized, adamantly, those
teachers whose dominant teaching style was lectures or
reading from the text and included few activities and
experiences. These teachers were labeled as boring. "It is
not the subject that is boring, it is the teacher,"
interjected one student.

Patient teachers were greatly lauded. Children, during
the group interview praised teachers who did not raise their
voices or become angry when the student had to seek help
several times.

An attitude of ambivalence was expressed by twenty-four
percent of the twenty-nine students making comments about
teachers in their autobiographies. Examples of these
comments were: "I like most of my teachers most of the
time," and "Some of my teachers are nice, but sometimes they
are mean." Ambivalent feelings were followed with
explanations such as: "This one teacher always talks about
how we dress and how we talk," or "One of my teachers is
very nosey." Still another example was: "I have one teacher
who does not believe me when I say that I am sick."

In contrast to the seventy-two percent of the children who expressed either positive or ambivalent feelings about their teachers in their autobiographies, twenty-eight percent of the children expressed negative thoughts, exclusively. These eight children commented that they thought that teachers were (a) prejudiced, (b) boring, (c) nosey, (d) nerve-wracking, or (e) mean. Three of the students claimed that certain teachers sometimes falsely accused them. Another students attributed his dislike of teachers to the fact that teachers gave him too much work to do. Still another student complained that his teacher expected too much of him.

"Mean," like the term "nice," had several different definitions. These definitions became clearer during the group interview, especially during the unsupervised interviews which the children conducted themselves. "Mean" teachers, according to children, were teachers who (a) raised their voices, (b) gave additional and unreasonable assignments, (c) punished the entire class for the actions of a few, (d) ridiculed, harassed and embarrassed students, (f) falsely accused students without just cause and (e) became unjustifiably angry with the class. Although mean teachers got results, children often retaliated by rebelling and writing obscene things about the teacher on the sidewalk or school building.

Thirty-three percent of the children stated in definite terms that they "liked all teachers." In contrast, none

of the children expressed a complete aversion to teachers. One boy did express doubt as he said "I think I do not like my teachers and sometimes I do not like my principal, but this is not unusual."

Several children complained that teachers became angry when children did not do as they were told. Feelings about this practice differed among the children. One child complained that teachers did not become angry enough, especially when the students did not finish their assignments or when the children were disrespectful. Most children, however, were concerned about the teacher who did become angry and classified these teachers as "mean."

Children's perceptions of teachers made a distinct difference in how children felt about school. "You know that it is going to be a good day when the teacher comes in and smiles at you." This statement, made during a group interview, underscored both the difference and the significance of the teacher in the life of the learner. Other examples of the teachers' influence emerged as the children wrote these comments in their autobiographies: (a) "I like school because of some of my teachers," (b) "I do not like school because of some of my teachers, (c) "I feel good in school when teachers say nice things about me," (d) "I feel bad when my teacher yells at me for not having my homework," and (e) "I like it when my teachers are happy."

Children reaffirmed their admiration, respect and appreciation for teachers throughout their autobiographies and during the interviews. They also expressed frustration and dissatisfaction with teachers who they perceived to be unfair, prejudiced and uncaring. "Some teachers," said one student, "make you feel happy inside. They care and don't give up on you. Other teachers just teach because it is a job, they don't seem to care what happens to you." Teachers, both caring and uncaring were portrayed as the pivots which make life different for each boy and girl within the classroom.

Subjects

Children's perceptions about the subjects in school varied from <u>fun, interesting</u>, and <u>easy</u> to <u>boring, tiring</u>, and <u>too hard</u>. Most of the remarks about subjects in school were limited to favorite and least favorite subjects. Math and physical education were cited most often as favorite subjects. Math, according to the children, was challenging and fun. Working with numbers, computers and self-pacing were especially appealing. The children believed that math would be beneficial eventually and that successful life skills included a good foundation in math.

Boys, more frequently than girls, chose physical education as their favorite subject. They felt that physical education provided freedom, variety and an

opportunity to release energy. Basketball and soccer were named as the children's favorite games.

The third most popular subject was science. Children's interest in science was inspired by their visions of becoming doctors and scientists. The children believed, unanimously, that science would be more interesting if teachers would provide more experiments and activities.

Reading and social studies were the least liked subjects. Both subjects were described as being boring or as including too much reading. Workbooks and worksheets were thought of as busy work. One student suggested that reading classes would improve if teachers would allow students to choose their own reading materials. The children felt that some of the boredom that they experienced in social studies would be eliminated if teachers would use current events, student reports, lively discussions, dramatizations and resource people during the class presentations.

Music was the third least favorite subject. Children thought that many of the songs and activities used in music classes were immature and boring. Children claimed that they did not enjoy singing and felt that their attendance in music classes should be optional.

The same subject was perceived differently by different students. For example, some students thought that reading was "fun" while most of the students who were unhappy with reading felt that reading was "boring," "tiring" and "hard."

Social studies was labeled as both "interesting" and "boring." Math was thought of as both "hard" and "fun." Several children felt there were not enough opportunities to participate in art classes. A few students mentioned that they did not like certain subjects, such as math and reading because they did not understand these subjects.

Besides boredom, the most frequent complaints voiced about school subjects were: (a) too much reading, (b) too much homework, and (c) too much writing. One boy wrote "I don't like English or reading classes because the teachers make us write too much. Math is easy because I don't have to write so much. I like Math because I am not copying sentences from a book. I like writing my own sentences and hate copying them from the reading and English books. Copying sentences makes me hate school."

Sixty-percent of the students chose to write about their perceptions of subjects in their autobiographies. "School is a place where you have easy subjects and hard ones, fun one and boring ones. Lots of times when you are spending all your time with a hard subject your easy subjects become hard and your fun ones become boring," remarked one student. This point of view seemed to have summarized the group's feelings about school subjects.

Milieu

Some other facets of school life that the children wrote about included: (a) the physical appearance of the school,

(b) text books (c) punishment, (d) the lunch period,

(e) recess, and (f) grades.

The children saw the physical appearance of the school

as a reflection of the pride and care shown by the people

within the school. Perceptions of an attractive school

facility included bright colors, flowers and trees.

Although custodians were recognized for their roles in

keeping schools clean, children felt that students should

take better care of the school's equipment and facilities.

Torn textbooks and textbooks with incorrectly handwritten

answers posed a problem for some children. Children

contended that children wrote incorrect answers in textbook

intentionally. This was perceived as a malicious act worthy

of punishment.

Punishment was mentioned in only a few instances.

Children did feel that punishment was appropriate when

children misbehaved but express adamant feelings against

punishing the entire class for the acts of a few or for the

acts of others.

Many complaints were registered about the lunch period.

The lunch period met with disdain because of the standard of

behavior and degree of "quietness" that most teachers

expected in the cafeteria. The children felt that they

should be able to talk freely with out any restraints. They

judged the practice of demanding absolute silence in the

cafeteria unfair and impractical. "If the cafeteria is too

noisy, then only those children who are being too loud

should be made to be quiet not the whole cafeteria," said one girl.

The only complaint about recess was the consensus that it was too short. Recess was often cited as the favorite activity of the day. Statements such as (a) "free to move around," (b) "a chance to talk to my friends," and (c) "a time to play" were frequently used to describe recess. Children felt that recess should be at least ten, fifteen or thirty minutes longer. Longer and more frequent recesses would enable children to do better in the classroom.

Reactions to school work varied. Some children thought that school was a "neat" place because of the work that was required there. They stated that they enjoyed the work and found it to be fun. One boy even stated that he wished there was more time for work, especially math. The children accepted the responsibility for doing school work as a "fact of life." "Sometimes school work is hard, but you just have to learn to hang with it," remarked one boy. Several children thought that teachers gave too much work, especially homework. Children felt that schoolwork should be done in school and not at home. They saw this as an invasion of freedom. One boy remarked: "I hate school because it is like a trap. We come to school to do work and then we have to take work home to do too. There is no time to play and to be free."

Grades were not mentioned very often. Several children felt that grades were important and indicated that they wanted to make "good grades." The relationship between doing good work and getting good grades was established. Factors such as concentration, completing school work, strict teachers, and teachers who are caring and helpful were all attributed to the probability of getting "good grades."

Children spoke boldly about their feeling, perceptions and beliefs about school. Goodlad (1984) stated:

> Students may be rather reliable indicators of
> classroom dynamics not readily observed or
> sensed by visitors to classrooms. And why not?
> They are at the heart of the process and
> undoubtedly have insight into what is going on.
> We have tended to overlook this rich source of
> intimate experience in seeking to know what goes
> on in classroom (p.101).

The data in this section illustrated some of the intimacies experienced by children in everyday school life.

Deliberations

Five sessions of deliberation were conducted with the children. Parts of these sessions were unsupervised, but recorded on the cassette player. A summary of each session is in this section.

Session One - Identification of Problems

The purpose of Session One was to identify problems which the children perceived as existing within the four

commonplaces of school. This session began with a review of the process of deliberation and the recall of data collected earlier. After this introduction, the children identified school problems which had surfaced during the interviews and introduced new problems as well. These problems were classified under the categories of learner, teacher, subject and milieu. The problems that were identified by the children are listed in TABLE I.

Session Two - Clarification of Problems

The categories and problems listed in Session One were reviewed and clarified in Session Two. Bullying, cursing, spreading rumors, name-calling, and prejudging students were perceived as being symptomatic of a larger problem--that of prejudice. Prejudice, in turn, was perceived as being the major cause of fights and poor student relationships. Definitions of prejudice were not limited to racial situations but were broadened to include anyone who treated others differently. Student prejudice was defined as prejudice directed by students toward other students.

Disobedient children, students who did not care, and student who were disrespectful were classified as rude and labeled as known trouble-makers.

The next discussion was from the category of the teacher. Many of the meanings listed under this category were clearly understood by the group. Other meanings in this category needed clarification. Bothersome and nosey

TABLE I

PROBLEMS AT SCHOOL

Learner	Teacher	Subject	Milieu
bullies	nosey	subjects not taught right	torn books
cursing	having pets	incomplete assignments	report cards
fights	do not explain	boring	detention
racial prejudice	careless	too many assignments	keeping a clean building
rumors discipline	teachers who ridicule	not enough assignments	reports
name-calling	teachers who treat kids like babies		
judging others	bothersome teachers		
picking on others	teachers who embarrass you		
prejudice	prejudice		
students who don't care	teachers who don't care		
students who don't get along	teachers who give too much or too little work		
disobedient children	teachers who talk too much		
poor student relationships			

teachers asked personal questions and interrupted and interfered in private conversations. Teachers who were conceited and talkative talked a lot about their children and themselves. Teacher who were described as being careless were teachers who misplaced assignments and graded papers incorrectly.

The only item needing to be clarified under the category of subject was subject areas. Subject areas referred to specific subjects which were perceived to be boring or hard. Many disagreements occurred during this discussion. Perceived problems for some children were not accepted as problems for others.

The item drugs was eliminated as a problem from the category of milieu since no one reported first-hand experiences with drugs or had knowledge of drugs or drug use at school. The person who listed this as a problem clarified his intentions by stating that it was the fear of drugs that posed the problem. Controversy stirred over whether bad report cards should be listed as a problem at school. The contention was that bad report cards were a problem at home instead of at school. Discipline slips were identified as office referrals for disciplinary action. Detention referred to being kept in after school.

The student's assessment of this session was a good one. They felt that many problems had been shared and they now realized that they were not alone in experiencing some of the problems mentioned.

Session Three - Selection of Most

Eminent Problem

Children continued to discuss the symptoms and problems
listed in Session One. Each of the ten students
independently chose one problem that he or she thought
needed immediate attention. The student then justified his
or her choice. All ten students chose problems from the
category of learner. Seven students chose prejudice as the
number one problem. The other three students chose: judging
others, fighting and starting rumors as the number one
problem. After much debate the three children who were in
the minority decided that judging others and spreading
rumors were characteristic of prejudice and that prejudice
was the leading cause of fighting. These children, then,
agreed that prejudice was the problem that was worthy of
immediate action.

The children believed in their choices. Evidences of
student to student prejudice had been discussed during
several group interviews and in Session One of the
deliberations. Attention, therefore, in this session was
focused on the consequences of prejudice. Children
believed: (a) that prejudice was the number one cause of
fighting, (b) that because of prejudice, students feelings
were hurt, (c) that being victimized by prejudice interfered
with school work--victims could not concentrate on school

work, and (d) victims of student prejudice did not feel good about themselves.

The children remarked that this session was one of their most interesting ones because they had an opportunity to express their feelings and to air a problem that had caused grave concern.

Session Four - Refinement of the
Focused Problem

This session focused primarily on student to student prejudice. Student redefined the concept of student prejudice as disliking someone because he or she is different and judging others because of their quality.

During the unsupervised part of this session children restated evidence of student prejudice. This evidence included: name calling, harassment, and making unwarranted judgments. One student, in reference to judging others said: "Kids judge you by your outside and not your inside."

Examples of student prejudice were given in the following examples:

1. "Like sometimes, if you are Black, then kids
   will call you 'blackie' or 'charcoal' and
   this may lead to a fight or something."

2. "When people get good grades, then they
   tease someone else because they don't have
   good grades."

3. "Students call kids with braces - 'brace

    face'. 'chrome teeth' and other things like

    that."

The student confirmed their choice of student prejudice
as the number one problem. This confirmation was based on
the number of fights that had happened and the apparent
causes of these fights.

The students reported that they felt that this session
had been fruitful and that a lot had been done.

Session Five - Plan of Action

The purpose of this final session was to develop of plan
of action for reducing student prejudice. It began with an
assessment of prejudicial measures. These measures
included: appearance, dress, affluence, racial status,
nationality, academic standing, and popularity.

The consequences of prejudicial acts were reviewed.
These consequences were: wounded feelings, fights, rumors,
poor self-concepts, and name calling.

The final part of this session focused on the
development of the plan of action. One student suggested
retaliation. He felt that prejudice would be eliminated if
the offender could also feel the sting of prejudice.

The formation of discussion groups designed to make
children aware of their prejudice, and to give children an
opportunity to talk about their feelings and their reasons

for their prejudicial acts was suggested by another student.

Another student suggested reducing the number of children on the playground at recess. This student contended that children sometimes committed prejudicial acts as a way of "showing off." This student believed that fewer students on the playground would result in a smaller audience and less satisfaction of showing off.

Still another student suggested punishment as a solution. This student recommended deprivation of recess or after school detention as appropriate punishments. Children who faced punishment, in this student's opinion, would think twice before committing prejudicial acts. Isolating offenders on the playground and having offenders to play alone were viable solutions suggested by several other students.

All the plans above except the formation of discussion groups were rejected. The children felt that retaliation was ineffective. Retaliation, most times, leads to other problems such as fighting and getting into trouble. Reducing the number of children on the playground at recess time calls for extra recess periods and would consequently cause scheduling problems. Punishment was also declared ineffective. Punishment, in the children's opinion, would only enrage, embitter and encourage the offender.

In view of these objections, the children unanimously chose the formation of group discussion as the accepted plan

of action. These groups would consist of the offenders and the victims of prejudice, a teacher with counseling skills, and several open-minded students. Frequency of meetings, time limits, and participants would be based on need. Activities during the group discussions would include role playing and open and honest discussions about feelings. Children would be expected to draw their own conclusion instead of being told what to do.

In conclusion, the students listed the benefits of effecting this plan of action. These benefits were: (a) fewer fights, (b) fewer rumors, (c) improved relationships, (d) students who are sensitive about the feelings of others, (e) better grades, (f) improved self-concepts and confidence and (g) improved attitudes.

As one student stated, this solution may not completely stop prejudice and fights but it surely would be a step in reducing the vestiges of prejudice which have such destructive consequences. After this session the children discussed how they felt about all the session. They felt that the experience had been interesting, revealing, and rewarding. They all expressed a desire to participate in other deliberations.

CHAPTER V

THE CHILDREN'S OWN STORY
(EDITED)

Editor's Note

Three volunteers from the student research team recorded
this chapter on audio-tape. First, the group agreed to use
the headings: Introduction, Learner, Teacher, Subject,
Milleu, Deliberation and Summary as an outline to frame the
story. Then the group reviewed audio-tapes and written
summaries recorded by students during the group interviews
and student deliberations. Finally, the group recalled,
extended, interpreted, and synthesized this data
spontaneously; thus unraveling their account of the
research experience. The speaker of each paragraph has been
fictitiously identified within the parenthesis. Those
paragraphs marked "group" consisted of comments from each of
the students.

Introduction

In this chapter, we [the volunteers from the student

research team] get a chance to tell our story about how we

feel about school, how other children feel about school, and

what school means to kids. We will talk about students,

teachers, subjects and everything about school, in general.

We will also discuss how kids react to some problems found

in school, like prejudice, fighting, and name-calling and

other problems in their educational life. Our job as

student researchers has helped us to write this story

(Group).

Our research experiences included choosing one major problem from the categories of teacher, learner, subject and milieu and through deliberations, we came up with a plan of action. Deliberation is choosing a subject, talking about the pros and cons and arguing those pros and cons with a group of people or sometimes just two people. In deliberation you can find out what the major problem is and how to solve that problem (Group).

Learners

We found that children had many different perceptions of and feelings about "the learner" and the learner's problems in school. One problem which children complained about was being falsely accused by teachers. This usually happens to children who are known as trouble-makers. A lot of times children around a trouble-maker will do something and the trouble-maker will get blamed for it. Another example is when the teachers come into a noisy class and blame the children who <u>usually</u> do the talking. They may or may not be the guilty ones; but the teacher usually looks straight at the trouble-makers as if they were the only ones doing the talking (Group).

One time we used to have this thing about pulling chairs out from under each other and one time a person who was not known as a trouble-maker walked by and pulled out another student's chair and the teacher looked straight at the person who sat behind the student whose chair was pulled

out, just because that person who sat behind this student was real bad. The teacher never one considered the student who had just walked by (Ann).

The kids on the research team found both negative and positive things to say about learners or peers. Some of the negative things were that children are mean, they call you names, they fight, they trick the teacher and they are rude to each other (Group).

Children often talk about each other. For example, there is this one girl that nobody likes who is always saying things like: "Oooh, why do you wear your hair that way?" or "You wear the same thing everyday" or "Why don't you get some new jeans or new shoes?" or even worse, like "Are you ever going to get your braces taken out?" All of these things hurt (Kevin).

Children sometimes snub other children and this is rude. Sometimes new children cannot make friends. I remember this one new girl who had only one friend and the other children stuck up their noses at the new girl just because she looked different (Shirl).

One time I was talking and this one girl butted in and said "You aren't supposed to talk about that. Other people can say that but you can't because you are not my friend." Children just don't get along. They show this by calling each other names and picking on each other (Ann).

Another thing that we [research team] found out is that a lot of children trick teachers. Most kids trick the

teacher by pretending that they were not the ones that were talking and then they brag about it (Kevin).

One of the biggest problem that we found among learners is fighting; some fist fighting, but mostly name calling and word fighting. There is a lot of pushing. We see some kind of fighting going on fifty percent of the time. I remember one time when the teacher was out of the room, and two guys began pushing each other one of the guys hit the other, but when the teacher came back, no one said anything (Ann).

There was one time when this boy pushed me against the wall and started hitting me in the stomach and when they saw the teacher they went back to their seats as if nothing happened (Kevin).

Kids fight a lot because they don't like each other or they are jealous. Sometimes it starts with someone calling someone else a name or someone talking about someone else's mama like "Oooh, your mama is so ugly (Ann)."

Kids are really not mad at each other; they are mad with themselves. They feel like no one likes them and they can't figure out what they have done wrong, so they just get mad with themselves and then they take their anger out on other people. They are angry with themselves because of the way they are treated or because they don't do well in school or they have gotten in trouble because of bad report card. This one boy got mad at himself because he got five A's and one B and his dad made him stay in every night to study. Too much pressure causes kids to be angry (Shirl).

Kids pick on other kids by talking about their looks. They show bad attitudes by cursing, trying to start a fight, calling names, being smart to the teacher, and aggravating others by flicking kids' ears and other things like that (Kevin).

Some positive things that children have to say about other students are that children are nice, they have good attitudes, they care about how school looks and they get good grades. During the group interviews, we defined "nice" children as those children who try to get along and don't do stuff to the teacher and don't fight, unless they have to defend themselves (Shirl).

Sometimes when someone different comes to school and no one likes the new person because of his accent or the way he dresses or smells or something like that, then a nice kid will come along and like that person anyway (Ann).

Actually, only about two out of ten kids are really nice, the others are just putting up a front. The situation though has a lot to do with it. Sometimes you are nice and then sometimes you are not so nice. At home you can be real nice to that person, but mean to the same person at school (Kevin).

There is one boy who is real nice to me when we are alone, but when we are in a group, he is all mean and things. It is really scary being a kid (Kevin).

Another positive thing that we found out is that children care about how the school looks. They want their

school to look better than the other schools. You will find kids picking up the candy wrappers that other kids drop at recess time and putting them in their pockets (Ann).

We found that kids really do care about getting good grades on their report cards. This is due mostly to the fact that they don't want to face their parents if they have bad grades because they don't want to get in trouble. Some kids would care even if they did not have this pressure, but half of the kids would not care (Shirl).

We feel that children just don't have enough freedom in school. We don't get to chew gum or eat in class or bring comic books. We don't get to choose our subjects or when we want to have that subject. I would choose language last if I had a choice because I don't like language (Shirl).

I wouldn't choose language at all and I would choose math last, because I don't like math. So you see we are all different (Ann).

Kids think that they should do like in junior high. Then we could choose the times when we would take a subject. One teacher would teach the same subject all day and the kids would choose when they would go to a particular subject. If there are problems with too many kids for a teacher then we could be chosen for classes, like in a sweepstake (Kevin).

Another suggestion would be to have one teacher teach the same subject all day for all grades instead of just one grade like in junior high. Then the sixth graders could

have one period and the fifth graders could have another period and the fourth graders could have another period (Shirl).

Some of us felt that children should not be given choices. Some children are too immature. Choices should be limited to children choosing when they wanted to take the subjects, but not to whether they take the subject or not because some children would not take the subjects that they really need and they would fall behind (Group).

One choice that we [the research team] thought children should have is whether they take PE and music. Some kids don't like PE just because they are short [in size] and are embarrassed. The teachers should still oversee the children' choices, though (Group).

Some kids like school because they like talking to their friends or they just want to get away from their troubles at home. Others, though, feel like school is a prison and their parents are just sending them to school because they don't want them at home (Ann).

Some children who feel like school is a prison and who really do not care about school may end up "bums" or "poor" when they grow up and that's really their fault because they didn't get a good school education. They will look back and say "I should have gotten a good education (Kevin)."

Some children really like school because they think it is a place where they can have fun with their friends and

also goof off. Then some kids really like to do the work because they like to work. A lot of kids, though, do not like to do the work and they do not do it well and get D's and F's in school. Other kids are willing to sacrifice and say "I rather not go out to play and work hard now, so that I can get a good job when I grow up (Group)."

Children really cheat themselves out of a good education. They cheat a lot. There is one girl, for example, who goes to the teacher's desk to get tissues a lot and as she throws the tissues away, she looks at the answers on the teacher's desk (Ann).

Cheating does not help at all, because as children get older they will not know anything, like arithmetic. If children have not learned addition, subtraction and division and they have to sign up for a job and they have to read or to do any of the other things learned in school, then they will not know how to do the job (Kevin).

Children cheat because they do not know how to do the assignments or they do not want to do the assignments. Instead of cheating, children should learn to trust their parents or teachers, who would be glad to help them (Ann).

Children really are not serious about school. They feel that it is a place to goof off. They copy, throw spit wads, shoot baskets by using paper wads and the trash can. They really waste time in school. Usually the teachers do not know that these things are going on or they will just ignore them because these things happen, so much, then some

teachers feel like these things will wear off with time and just go away. At least eight children out of ten feel that school is a place to goof off (Shirl).

Those children who do not goof off usually just do not like goofing off, or they do not want to get in trouble. Some children also know what they are going to have to do in life and they set their goals early. They know what they are going to strive for and they take school very seriously. Very few children, though, feel this way (Kevin).

Children come to school because they do not have a choice. They also come to school to socialize, to meet their friends, and a few come to work. If teachers want to change that then teachers need to make school more interesting. Instead of having so much work, teacher could have more activities and more games. In social studies and math, for example, the work could be in the form of games and activities. Children will have fun and still learn a lot about that subject. We need many more activities (Ann and Shirl).

We know that some children are learning at school because they will say things like "Oh I didn't know that" or "That's neat" or after the teacher teaches the subject they will ask questions about what the teacher has said (Shirl).

If children like the teacher they will usually like the subject. If they have an interesting teacher, then they will want to learn more about that subject (Ann).

Children also pay attention to teachers who are humorous, interesting, have good attitudes and good personalities. If they are too humorous though, then there is sometimes a problem because kids don't know whether the teacher is making fun of them and then they end up not liking that subject or that teacher (Shirl). During the deliberations we talked about punishment in school. Some of us thought that kids who misbehaved should be punished in schools and some thought that children just shouldn't be punished at all (Kevin).

One recommendation for punishing children would be to make them sit still for thirty minutes and then for thirty minutes write an essay on why they did it and if they had a choice of doing it again, would they do it again (Ann).

Another recommendation was that the teacher should assign extra work to the kid who is being punished and perhaps put them in isolation (Shirl).

Teachers need to be careful when putting children in isolation, though. In one instance the isolation room was the same rooms where the teachers guides were kept and this one boy like to go to isolation so that he could use the teachers guides. An isolation room should have nothing in it at all. No windows or nothing (Kevin).

Some kids thought that children should not be punished because the punishments are not effective. As soon as the child goes home then they get to look at TV and eat popcorn and life just goes on and they forget that they have even

been punished. There are really no good punishments at school (Ann).

There is really no such thing as "bad students." Some children just have a lot of things bottled up inside them like when they were young, something happened to them or they don't have any friends so they are just angry at everybody. They are just angry with the world (Shirl).

All children want to learn but may not show it. All children really want to be something when they grow up. If adults would talk more to children it would really help. Individual counseling would also help. Talking to parents will not help as much because so many children just don't care about their parents and what their parents think. Some parents don't care about their children either. One girl told me about a friend who said her parents don't care how she gets home just as long as she gets home. They don't care if she hitchhikes or what (Ann).

There are several things teachers can do to help the learner. Teachers can talk to children and try to get into some of their feelings and then teachers can make school more interesting by having more activities. These thing would really improve our schools (Group)

Teachers

Children have different thoughts about teachers. Some children think that teachers are helpful, some think that teachers work because they are paid to do a Job (Kevin).

Teachers are helpful when teachers take students aside and work with them until they understand. Some teacher aren't as helpful, though. About six out of ten teachers are really helpful. The other four are just doing a job (Group).

We can tell that teachers are just doing a job when they don't seem to care about our feelings. They seem to say, "It's just another day, who cares if they [the children] really don't understand all of this (Ann)."

Really, there is no such thing as a "bad teacher." There are some who are not as concerned as "good teachers" but there are no "bad teachers (Shirl)."

A fun teacher teases a lot and sometimes this is all right. A fun teacher is also someone who communicates with the children, laugh and really tries to teach us stuff and they have lots of activities (Kevin & Shirl).

An example of a fun teacher is one who likes to play games and let us play games. We learn more when the teacher is fun and interesting (Ann).

An interesting teacher makes learning fun and answers questions truthfully without giving us roundabout answers. Interesting teachers also answer questions the best that they know how, even if the students are just asking questions to take up time. For example, if we ask "Why did they give Christopher Columbus the money to come to America?" They may not really know but will answer the best that they know how (Shirl).

A nice teacher is many things. A nice teacher is one
who praises us verbally instead of giving us something
for being good (Shirl).

A nice teacher is someone who will love us and who is
also very concerned if we get hurt. A nice teacher
would do for us what she would do for her own kids
(Ann).

A nice teacher doesn't care if we are not the smartest
person in the world. She will not say "Oh you are
stupid." Then they will just teach us so that we will
be the smartest person in the world (Kevin).

A nice teacher will help if we have troubles at home and
we need someone to confide in we can turn to them
(Shirl).

A nice teacher tutors. If we don't know how to add,
she'll teach us. Like if we go into the class and don't
know how to add, when we come out we will know how to
add (Kevin).

A nice teacher will give you a ride home if your Mom
does not come to pick you up (Shirl).

A nice teacher sometimes get pushed over because she
keeps saying over and over again "Don't do that." Like
if one day she catches you chewing gum, she will say,
"Don't do that, Jackie," and the next day she catches

you chewing gum again, she will say, "Now Jackie, I told you not to chew gum." She just keeps on being nice. A strict teacher is better in that case because once she tells you something, you do it or never do it again (Ann).

If we do something wrong, a nice teacher will say, "That's okay (Kevin)."

Let's switch to "mean teachers" (Shirl).

A mean teacher is someone who, instead of praising us verbally for doing good, will give us something for being good, and then the next time won't give us anything at all. Usually, then we will stop being good. Then the next time they will give us something (Shirl).

A mean teacher is prejudiced. Once two kids who were both different colors, one was white and one was black, were talking in the cafeteria. The white kid was allowed to slide, the black kid had to go to the office (Ann).

A mean teacher is one who assigns busy work (Kevin).

A mean teacher is one who explains the first two problems and if we don't understand the third and fourth problems they will say, "I told you how to work the first two, now you should know the rest (Shirl)."

A mean teacher is a teacher who when we don't understand something and we go to him or her and he or she explains it the very same way and we go to them again and they will explain it the same way again and we still don't understand and then we end up making an F (Ann).

A mean teacher is one who yells at us when you ask a question (Kevin).

A mean teacher traps you. For example, she may say stay in your seat and if you have to sharpen your pencil you get yelled at for being out of your seat; but if you try to talk, in order to ask, then you get yelled at for talking (Shirl).

A mean teacher says when we don't understand, "Just read the directions; you all know how to read," and we read the directions for about four times and we still don't understand (Ann).

A mean teacher makes us do the whole assignment over instead of just the ones we missed (Kevin).

Teachers yell at us about talking; about getting out of our seats; and about accidentally breaking the pencil sharpener (Shirl).

Not having a sharpener pencil really gets us in trouble. The teacher sometimes gives us a real hard time and yells at us if we have problems with our pencils (Ann).

Some teachers become angry because we have to sharpen our pencils and even if we have to go to the bathroom. If one person does something bad, then everyone gets fussed at (Kevin).

Children make teachers happy when they do good, when they compliment the teacher, when they come to school with all of our homework done, when the class is good, and when they do well on their test (Shirl).

A strict teacher won't let us get out of our seats, not even to sharpener our pencils. A strict teacher also seems to know just who is doing the talking. Strict teachers make children do their work. Strict teachers also yell a lot. Still, they expect more and are really nice (Group).

Children prefer teachers who don't try to bribe them. Some teachers offer rewards for making good test scores. There is this one teacher who give a lollipop for every five correct answer. This makes school interesting and the children really try hard to get the rewards. Test averages really go up. Our reading test average went up from 79 to 91 (Shirl & Kevin).

Although bribery works and we are used to it, it really is not good for the student in the long run, because children grow up expecting to receive something for everything they do. At work, if the manager tells them to do something, the person wants to know what's in for me and if there is no immediate reward, then they are not interested in doing a good job (Kevin).

Some children try hard because they want the reward, but when they grow up they are not going to try as hard on the job because they know they are not going to get anything except your pay, of course, but then that is not something that you will get right then and there (Shirl).

Teachers are not always fair with rewards. Instead of giving the individual student a reward which is usually candy, they will say "If the entire class does 80% or 90% or better they will say you can go outside and then the class does not make it and everyone has to suffer. It really isn't fair, because a lot of times the children who do not make it really try to do their best (Ann).

Another example is when the teacher gives us tickets and promises a trip or something else special for each student who has earned a certain amount of tickets for good behavior (Shirl).

One time most of the children worked really hard to earn the tickets and then a few goofed off and did not earn their tickets but still got to go on the field trip. This was not fair because everyone could have goofed out at that rate (Kevin).

Bribery or offering rewards is sometimes a good thing, but sometimes teachers use it too much. They also threaten children with it too much. For example, the teacher may say, "If you do not get all of your tickets, then you cannot go on the trip," but in the end everybody gets to go anyway. That just is not fair (Ann).

Children prefer teachers who try to be nice and those teachers who they can trust. If we tell them something, we know that they will help us (Ann).

Children also prefer teachers who are fun at times but who are also strict (Shirl).

Teachers are not fair when they automatically blame kids without even knowing what is going on. They also aren't fair when they pick favorites (Kevin).

Lots of teachers have favorites. You know who is the teacher's favorite because she always asks her favorite to do everything, like go to the office, or take this note to Mrs. Jones (Shirl).

Teachers also use their favorites all the time as examples. The teacher may say "You see Krisiti is really a good person. She never does this or she never does that (Ann)."

It's hard to be a teacher's favorite, though, because the other kids won't like you. They will say "Oh, you are the teacher's pet. When you do something wrong, the teacher lets it slide, but when we do something wrong, we get into trouble." They will also say, "You are always right in the teacher's eyes (Shirl)."

Teacher pets are under a lot of pressure from children. Sometimes kids won't let them into their groups. There is really no advantage in being a teacher's pet but some kids try to be the teacher's pet by always raising their hands and always giving the teacher stuff (Kevin).

Teachers are aware that they have pets. Those usually choose kids who don't do anything wrong and those kids who get good grades, mostly girls (Kevin).

Another time when teachers are unfair is when you are the only one in the classroom with your hand up and the teacher knows you know the answer, but the teacher won't call on you. Then another time you have your hand down and don't know the answer but the teacher calls on you anyway (Shirl).

We would recommend that teachers treat everyone equally, no matter what they have done or whether they are good or bad. We would also recommend that teachers only choose kids who have their hands up to answer questions. Children don't learn by being called on but by listening to other children who know (Ann).

A "good teacher" cares about her students and explains things well before giving an assignment. She is also strict, but fun and won't yell at you when you need help even though you have asked three or four times. A "good teacher" teaches you instead of just giving assignments or the answers (Shirl).

We would also recommend that teachers take children aside who don't understand, and teach them by themselves until they do understand. Maybe they can have a small room with several desks for tutoring (Kevin).

It would help to tape record the class each day. It would help teachers evaluate themselves and would also help the teacher to act better (Shirl).

We recommend study groups for prejudiced teachers. The child should be able to go to someone like a principal or an assistant principal and tell him or her about the whole story and then that principal or assistant would go to that teacher and ask him or her about it (Ann).

Then, we recommend that teachers really be strict. If they are not, then children will take advantage, especially of substitutes (Shirl).

One game that children play with substitutes is "sink the sub." In that game you try to annoy the substitute as much as possible by switching names and things like that (Kevin).

Subjects

Our research team did not talk much about how we feel about subjects. Most kids on the research team chose PE as their favorite subject because they get to run and have funand talk. They get to play and choose what they want (Shirl).

A few kids chose science because quite a few kids want to be scientists or doctors. At the end of the year when the teacher gave away books, most of the kids took the science books (Ann).

We felt that children chose these subjects as favorite subjects not because of the subject but because of the way the subject is taught. Kids just don't like boring subjects (Kevin).

Dull teachers make boring subjects, they just copy right out of the book and don't give examples or try to make the subject fun or interesting (Shirl).

The subject is also boring if you just don't like the subject or if you don't like the teacher. A lot of busy work also makes subjects boring (Ann).

Some of the children chose social studies because kids like the world and what is happening. They like history and people's lives (Shirl).

Few children chose reading as their favorite subject. This is probably so because kids don't like to read and think that reading is for "smart kids" who like to carry around books. Kids are also lazy about reading and don't like to admit that they like to read. Television has had a big effect because kids figure if they can watch it, they don't have to read it. Watching TV though, does not teach children how to pronounce words (Group).

Spelling is a very easy subject. Other easy subjects depends upon the student and the teacher. Math is almost always hard. We feel that subjects should be adjusted to the child's ability. Children in Gifted and Talented should have harder subjects, for instance (Group).

Subjects for children in Gifted and Talented classes should be taught separately. When Gifted and Talented students are taught with other students, the other students slow down the pace of gifted and talented kids or the teacher will just give them a book and say "Go on and work it." That's not always fair because you don't always understand but the teacher will say "Oh go on you can do it (Shirl)."

The subjects should be rotated, so that children would not go to the same subject each day. Subjects for GT Kids should end an hour early both in the morning and afternoon, so that the GT kids could also take subjects with other kids and even tutor them (Kevin).

Subjects for slow learners should also be different. Slow learners though should just be in special classes no more than two hours a day (Ann).

Subjects should be more interesting. Social studies is a real good area where teachers can provide more activities and games. Turning questions into a game activity makes the children think they are having fun. They children are saying "Oh, this is fun, I really like social studies" and the teachers are saying "They are really learning something (Kevin & Shirl)."

Another suggestion for social studies is to turn a lesson into a play and let the children play act the event. A play on Christopher Columbus will teach the children much

more about Christopher Columbus then just reading about it
(Ann).

Milieu

Milieu was a new word for us. We learned that milieu is
anything that does not fall under the category of teacher,
learner and subject. It is anything else that deals with
school. One thing that we felt was needed under this
category was new books. This was important because so many
of the books have been written in. Workbook type textbooks
that could be written in and taken home would be good. This
way we would have them in case we forget (Group).

Some of us did not think that it was important to keep
the school clean and others thought that it was. It is all
a matter of pride. Some kids like to compete with other
schools in looking good. Kids should help keep the school
clean and neat (Kevin).

We feel that schools need a variety of things. For
example, more mirrors in the girls' bathroom. These are
important because girls like to do their hair in the mirrors
(Ann).

Schools also need longer recesses. These recesses need
to be organized. Fewer people need to be on the playground
at one time. If recesses are divided into play areas and
age groups, it would be better. Sixth graders don't like to
be around fourth graders, particularly (Group).

Better recesses would help us to do better in school. A
ten o'clock snack time would also help because kids get
hungry while they are working during the day (Ann).

All in all, school is boring and sometimes fun and
always needed. School is a good place to learn. We just
did not talk as much about milieu or subjects because there
were not as many problems found in these areas as in other
areas (Group).

To improve school, we would recommend shorter class
periods, different recess periods for different ages, two
twenty minutes recesses. We feel that school gives an idea
of what it is like to be in the world (Kevin).

Deliberation

We learned a problem solving method called deliberation.
We found many problems under each of the categories that we
talked about. Some of the problems under the learner were:
cursing, prejudice, bullies, calling names, judging others
by their looks and most of all fights. Some other problems
under the category of learner were cheating and talking
about people (Group).

Some problems we have with some teachers are: teachers
who are prejudiced, teachers who pick on us, teachers who
are bothersome, teachers who give too much work, and
teachers who treat us like babies. Some other problems
with teachers are nosy teachers, teachers who do not explain

things well and teachers who will embarrass the students (Group).

Other major problems with teacher are teachers who have teacher pets, teachers who are conceited and teachers who make fun of you. Some more problems with teachers are teacher's bad habits, like talking too much. When teachers talk too much you can't do your work. Some teachers are careless, they will give us an assignment we have already done, and when we tell them, they don't believe us and when we show them they will say "Oh you must have done that with the substitute, well just do it over (Group).

Major problem found with subjects were subjects that were not taught right, boring subjects and too many assignments. But it is not the subject but the way it is taught. Subjects should be taught seriously and the teacher should not just give assignments (Shirl).

Problems found in the area of milieu included the pink slip, or a slip the teacher writes out when you are in trouble. Lunch tickets are a problem because kids are always leaving them on their desk or dropping them, or bending them and then they won't go into the machine. I think that kids should just bring money for lunch. Conferences with parents, getting name on the board, discipline problems, the way the school looked and books being written in, were also problems found under milieu. Having kids to stay after school is a problem because if a kid has to stay for thirty minutes after school, then you

don't know who will be out there waiting on that kid
(Group).

Although all of problems that we identified during deliberations were important, we felt that student prejudice [prejudice shown among students] was the most serious. Almost all of the children reported that fights were the number one problem in school. As we looked at fights a little closer though, we found that these fights were caused by students judging other students by the way they look, how they talk, how many friends they have or what kind of grades they make and this is prejudice (Group).

People picking on other people also cause fights. If you are picked on you don't feel good about yourself or anyone else. Rumors also lead to fights. All of these go back to prejudice (Shirl).

Prejudice leads to other things like kids writing on the walls, doors and sidewalk about other people and that mess up the school (Ann).

Also, if you have been in a fight, then your work tends to slack up because you are thinking about what happened doing the fight (Kevin).

We came up with a plan of action which called for forming discussion groups for kids who are prejudice or were prejudice. Kids would talk about their prejudices and what makes them feel bad. They will also feel more secure around each other. Discussion groups would help us to stop some of the fights and problems at school (Group).

We hope that this solution stops some of the prejudices which exist and will also stop some of the fighting at school. If this does happen then children would feel better about themselves and do a much better job in school (Ann & Shirl).

Conclusion

This chapter has given you an idea of how students feel about school. We think that we have come up with some solutions to help with some of the problems that we have at school. We hope that you will put some of these ideas and solutions into a form of action. If you add some of your solutions to our solutions then school would be a much better place (Ann).

Now that you are aware of the problems from our stand point of view, maybe you can help to make school a better place. Our perceptions are just what we think. Adults have their own perceptions. Putting these perceptions together with adult perception will help you to understand school better and will help you to know what children think about school. This chapter may also help you to understand why children get into trouble at school (Shirl).

It was fun being a researcher. If we all had another opportunity to be a researcher we would all be again. We think that children should be asked about school and used as researchers. Children have their own ideas about school, whereas adults have adult ideas about school and these are

sometimes different. Children have ideas about how they see
school now. Adults have ideas about school when they went
to school (Kevin).

Being a student researcher was really good because it is
really the student who is dealing with the problem at
school. Children can think about problems as children see
them and not as adults see them. All of this will help us
to have better schools (Group).

CHAPTER VI

INTERPRETATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The children in this study enabled me to look at school and its culture through children's views of reality. Culture, one of the most powerful influences on how a school conducts itself, is what people do and know. In addition, culture is the means by which people make sense of their setting (Heckman, Oakes, and Sirotnik, 1983; Spradley, 1980). These definitions of culture provided a useful perspective from which to view school and helped to frame a picture of how children perceive and interpret the intended meanings of others within the school setting. These perceptions and interpretations, in turn, led me to a better understanding of children at school and helped to establish the basis for the recommendations which will be presented later in this chapter.

School life is too complex to be viewed or talked about from any single perspective. Therefore, I have chosen several ways of understanding school life as perceived by children. This approach is supported by Hunter's (1984) and Jackson's (1968) beliefs that many different ways of understanding school exist, and all possible ways must be made available to fully understand what school is really

like. The interpretations, implications, and recommendations in this chapter, therefore, are based on the cultural views of children, a variety of theories gathered from various psychologists and educators, and my personal and professional observations throughout twenty-one years of experience as an educator.

Interpretations

Three common themes that prevailed throughout the children's descriptions of their perceptions and interpretations of school were: (a) love and affection, (b) the learning process, and (c) the observable features of the physical and social environment. These themes, framed by Schwab's (1978) contextual commonplace variables of teacher, learner, subject and milieu, reflect children's beliefs, feelings, and values about school.

The beliefs, feelings, and values that children have about school are based largely upon their perceptions of the symbolic and vicarious experiences which occur at school. These everyday experiences are important in children's lives at school because they help to build reality for children as they constantly think about and interpret their own experiences.

Bandura (1977) explained this theory by maintaining that human behavior is a continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental determinants. According to this conception, children are

neither powerless objects controlled by environmental forces nor are they free to become whatever they choose. Instead, children through the reciprocal interplay between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental determinants are active interpreters of and interactors with the many facets of their environment.

Love and Affection

The data collected in this study clearly show that children want to be loved, accepted, respected, and appreciated by their friends, peers, and teachers. Children look for evidence of love and affection in a variety of ways. Younger children seek physical signs of love, such as being touched, hugged, or held as proof of being loved. Older children seek love and affection through (a) teachers' displays of patience, kindness, understanding; (b) feelings of acceptance and belonging; (c) visible signs of warmth, such as smiles, notes, praise, and recognition; (d) emotional support and encouragement; and finally (e) sensitivity to individual feelings and needs (Hymes, 1955). Visible signs which most often provided evidence of the teacher's love for the children in this study included: teachers' smiles, compliments, care, concern, patience, and display of interest in the children's needs and interests.

Friends and peers provide another important source of love and affection for children. Trust, sharing secrets,

mutual respect, and loyalty are signs of peer affection and acceptance. The love and affection gotten from friends, peers, and teachers are important to children's successful social and psychological adjustment in school.

All children need love to grow and develop. It is evident from the data collected in this study that not all children feel loved and accepted. Instead, some children feel deprived of love and affection and experience feelings of hurt, inadequacy, and insecurity. These children are easily distracted, are less able to relate to others satisfactorily, and are more likely to become uncooperative, irritable, unreasonable, or hostile. Such reactions often lead to violence, detachment, dependence, and disobedience (Williams and Stith, 1974).

The student research team used in this study held several general beliefs about children who feel deprived of love. They believed that children who perceive themselves as being unloved and unaccepted by their peers also have trouble with liking themselves and others. The research team further believed that children who feel unloved and unaccepted: (a) have more difficulty with school work, (b) are less successful with other school-related activities, (c) are less popular, (d) are less effective, (e) are more defensive, and (f) lack self-confidence. These impoverished feelings of love and affection are directly related to theories of poor self-concepts. Children who are beset with poor self-concepts often experience the same

feelings of inadequacies.   In contrast, children who maintain positive self-concepts are more successful, more confident, well-accepted, better achievers, and are often cast in the role of leaders.

Self-concepts have a great effect on school achievement, perceived social status among peers, perceptions of peers and teachers, student motivation, and self-direction in learning.   Children with positive self-concepts will develop a sense of self-worth, independence, and self-confidence. These attributes lead to higher social acceptance and school achievement.   Conversely, learners with poor self-concepts perceive themselves as worthless and dependent (Beane, Lipka, Ludewig, 1980; McCandless, 1967; Williams & Stith, 1974).   McCandless (1967) described poor self-concepts as a vicious circle.   Children with poor self-images open themselves to less social interaction, acceptance, respect and success.   These reactions, in turn, reinforce negative self-concepts.

The student research team built a simplicitic and yet dynamic rationale for love and affection in school.   They maintained that some children come to school angry, encumbered with feelings of low esteem, poor self concepts and deprived of love and affection.   Other children become angry and develop poor concepts once they arrive.   In response to these observations, the research team proposed that schools through awareness, sensitivity, and effort become a reservoir of love and affection.

They believed that teachers, friends and peers can and do make a significance difference in how children feel about themselves in school. Teachers, through respect, fairness, sensitivity, flexibility, love and affection, can help learners to set and maintain high expectations, develop self-respect, and enhance self-concept. Friends and peers through acceptance, respect, love and affection can help to fulfill the insatiable desire and need to belong. School people, then, are an important source of love and affection. These expressions of love and affection may make school a better place for children who need a place to thrive, grow and develop or for children who simply need a better place to be.

Still another rationale for love, affection and a love-based elementary school was established by Dobson and Dobson (1976). They contended that each person is his own potential of energy and that love is the unlimited reservoir of this energy. They further contended that the elementary school is committed to the release of human energy and must therefore function with a love base. Positive school experiences formed from a love base lead to success, recognition, acceptance, participation-involvement, joy and sharing. Negative school experiences, on the other hand, reflect expressions of failure, punishment, rejection, disruption and other painful experiences. In sum, love and affection may act as a catalyst for the realization of human potential through a love-based school.

The Learning Process

A second theme which emerged during the children's descriptions of school was the learning process. Topics under this theme included: (a) the value of learning; (b) the relationship of teaching styles, teachers behaviors, and teachers' personalities to student achievement, classroom performance, and teacher effectiveness; and (c) subject preferences. Although children see school primarily as a socializing agency where friends and peers meet, they also recognize the value of getting an education. They accept school as being good for them and assume most teachers are doing their jobs effectively.

The children in this study were able to associate specific teaching styles and teacher behaviors with classroom performance and student achievement. For example, teachers who vary their teaching strategies to include demonstrations, hands-on activities, teaching games, and classroom discussions effect classroom performance and student achievement. Also, teachers who offer individual help often effect classroom performance and student achievement. Ausubel (1968) contended that styles of teaching vary primarily because teachers' personalities vary.

The children in this study predicted that student achievement would be higher and classroom performance would be better if teachers would place greater emphasis on student activity, student participation, and student

involvement in setting course objectives and determining course content. Furthermore, the children believed that learners exposed to these types of teaching styles are more attentive, interested, and enthusiastic about learning than learners who are subjected primarily to lectures, drills, and content read from the textbook.

Effective teachers, according to the children in this study, are caring, enthusiastic, patient, creative, and interesting. Effective teachers also insist on quality performance, set high expectations and standards for their students, believe in their students, are knowledgeable about their subject matter and encourage children to take personal responsibility for their own learning.

The research team labeled effective teachers as (a) "strict," (b) "helpful," and (d) "caring." They clearly preferred these types of teachers to teachers who they perceived as being overly permissive or mean. Children believe that learners work harder and behave more positively if the teacher creates and maintains a positive classroom climate characterized by effective teaching styles, teaching behaviors, and personality traits.

Hart (cited in Ausubel, 1968) also believed that children respond affectively to the personality characteristics and teaching styles of teachers and that these affective responses influence children's judgments of teachers' instructional effectiveness. Children admire teachers who exhibit effective teaching skills, clarity,

task orientation, and good classroom control. Children are also highly appreciative of fairness, impartiality, patience, cheerfulness, and sympathetic understanding as well. In contrast, children dislike favoritism, prejudice, punishment, irritability, noisiness, and bribery. These preferences and dislikes will be discussed next.

Observable Features of the Physical
And Social Environment

The environment consists of both physical and social elements. The two physical aspects that concerned the children in this study most were the physical appearance of the school building and damaged textbooks. Children want an aesthetically pleasing school and are willing to share the responsibility of maintaining such an environment. Attractive schools reflect a sense of pride and care.

Children are frustrated with damaged books. Torn and worn books are unattractive and hard to read. Books which do not show wear and tear often have incorrect answers written in them. These incorrect answers, sometimes intentionally written, are confusing, misleading, and frustrating.

The social elements in the environment include people and their patterns of activity which are shaped by groups and society in general (Hollander, 1981). One major social environmental element which concerned the children in this study was prejudice. Prejudice is manifested through

name-calling, fighting, and exclusion. Children base their

prejudice on materialistic possessions, popularity,

scholastic achievement, and differences in dress,

appearance, and mannerisms. These imposed standards

function to produce an insider-outsider distinction among

peers. Usually, the insiders set the standards or make

rules which categorize other individuals as outsiders.

Knowledge, thought, or reason are ignored when forming

opinions or attitudes about outsiders. Consequently,

outsiders are not accepted as individuals, instead, they are

rejected because of some preconceived feeling (Hollander,

1981; Williams and Stith, 1974).

Learners believe that teachers prejudge them by the

learner's appearance, past conduct, motivation, and

scholastic achievement. Teachers show their prejudice by

humiliating, ridiculing, offending, and excluding some

children, regularly. One group of children who are often

subjected to vestiges of prejudice, for example, are

trouble-makers. Children who have been labeled as

trouble-makers are often denied respect, approval and

acceptance from teachers. Trouble-makers are routinely

blamed for unresolved classrooms infractions, are seldom

chosen to run errands and are often denied special

privileges which are extended to those children who are

thought of as being cooperative and congenial. They are

recognized less often, punished more and severely, listened

to less, and are subject to more embarrassment, ridicule,

and humiliation. If these children react to these patterns
of rejection, then their attitudes are viewed as further
evidence of their being a trouble maker. These children
become very negative about school and perceive themselves as
being unloved and unaccepted.

The practice of choosing teacher favorites or teacher
pets further shows teacher prejudice. Trouble-makers, poor
achievers, or children who the teachers perceive as
socially, culturally, or economically inferior are seldom if
ever chosen as teacher pets. Teacher pets run the errands,
are recognized more frequently, and get into less trouble.
Although children want the advantages that come with being a
teacher's pet and often vie for this position, they do not
like the distinctions that it brings. Teacher pets are
disliked and are often ostracized and criticized by other
students. The children in this study were opposed to the
favoritism and prejudice sometimes shown by teachers and
recommended that teachers deal with students in terms of
their individual qualities.

Children also prejudge teachers. These prejudgments are
based on teachers' reputation, age, race, and sex. Parents'
attitudes also influence children's feelings toward their
teachers. Children show these prejudices by being hostile,
disrespectful, and malicious toward the teacher.

Children are opposed to prejudice and its consequences.
They see prejudice as a prevalent and global problem which
is rooted deeply in children's upbringing. Recommendations

from the research team which are designed to control prejudice are given later in this chapter.

Children's feelings about punishment and rewards in school surfaced frequently throughout the autobiographies, interviews, and deliberations. Children realize that a minimal level of order and decorum is necessary for efficient school learning. The research team believed that objectionable student behavior and student interference with classroom learning should be limited or prevented. Rules, regulations, standards, and expectations are needed to limit classroom interference and maximize student performance. Punishment, when necessary, should be fair and reasonable.

Children's perceptions of fair and reasonable punishment include investigating the situation carefully, weighing the evidence, and finally awarding either a restriction or detention. Many children in this study were in favor of using counseling as an alternative to punishment when seeking solutions to discipline problems. Effective counseling allows students to talk about their problems and to reach viable solutions. This study shows that children care about what happens to them in school and that children are capable of and interested in solving problems.

Rewards are commonly used by teachers to encourage positive behavior and inspire better classroom performance. Children, however, associate reward systems with bribery. While children appreciate and enjoy the common practice of being offered rewards in turn for good work and good

behavior they feel that teachers often abuse the use of rewards. Rewards, in the children's opinions, are given too frequently, are used to threaten children, and are awarded inappropriately and with impropriety. Children like rewards but dislike being manipulated by them.

This interpretation of the data collected from children gives concrete meaning to children's perceptions of school. Both the data and interpretations presented in this study confirm Shulman's (1986) notion that children at school are constantly discerning and reforming the meanings intended by others within the school culture, and are actively contributing to new meanings as well. Children contribute to the understanding of school. Gathering student perceptions and holding student deliberations facilitate this process.

Recommendations

First, I recommend conducting continuous research aimed at solving practical problems and designed to process practical decisions at the local school site. Input should be gathered from a variety of sources within the school setting. Traditionally, individuals at the local school site have been considered the benefactors of research. These individuals, especially students, must also be given key roles in the research process.

Student input, as substantiated by this study, is important in effecting change within the school. Student

Input allows others to understand the student's structures, behaviors, meanings, and belief systems. Autobiographies, interviews, and ongoing observations are all techniques which facilitate the inclusion and involvement of students.

Schubert (1986) contended that quantitative methods have dominated educational research for too long. Although quantitative methods are needed for certain kinds of information and educational decisions, more illustrative, practical, and decision-oriented research must be conducted. Researchers who become intimately involved in situational dilemmas are more apt to see possibilities for decision and action and are better able to generate a greater range of consequences as they deliberate and act than researchers who ascribe meanings based on the researcher's point of view and without the consideration of the viewpoint of those from within.

Another recommendation which evolves from the interpretations of children's perceptions of school involves developing a conscientiousness for and response to children's need for love and affection. The literature and data collected in this study clearly suggest that children have a strong ever-present need for love, affection, and a sense of belonging and acceptance by their friends, peers, and teachers (Dobson & Dobson 1976; Lane & Beauchamp 1955; William and Stith 1974). Some children believe, however, that they are unloved and unaccepted. These children often dislike school and sometimes get into trouble at school

because they act out in anger, rebellion and defiance. Often misunderstood or not understood, these children are labeled as trouble-makers and the circle of behavioral responses becomes vicious. That is, these children misbehave because they are in trouble and they are in trouble because they misbehave. Combs and Snygg (1959) explained this in part by asserting that reality, which is derived from children's perceptual fields, influences and directs children's behavior. Children, therefore, behave according to to how they perceive the situation at the moment.

This thought leads to a third recommendation. This recommendation is to seek ways to know and to understand children's thoughts, perceptions and realities. Dobson, Dobson, & Koetting (1985) and Rogers (cited in Dobson et al., 1985) admitted that no one except the individual can truly know his or her private world (reality) or how a certain experience is perceived. These realities and perceptions are not always clear to that individual. Still, by being aware of the realities and perceptions of others, there is a potential for an understanding of an individual's realities and perceptions both by that individual and by others.

A fourth recommendation comes from children's perceptions of the learning process. Again, the data clearly showed that children want to learn. Children want to become skilled. Educators sometimes seem to forget,

however, how children learn. Children learn best when they
are actively involved in the learning process. Activity,
according to Hymes (1955) is a child's trademark. Dobson
and Dobson (1976) contended that children are naturally
active--constantly seeking, setting, and striving to obtain
self-directed goals. I recommend, therefore, that teaching
strategies include a variety of activities which allow
students to experiment, demonstrate, and explore.

The student researchers pointed out that children prefer
being active participants in the learning process. They
want to perform experiments, participate in demonstrations
and engage in learning games and activities. Dobson and
Dobson (1976) generalized that children experience a sense
of satisfaction, worthiness, pleasure, and stimulation from
sharing in meaningful, interesting, challenging, and
group-oriented experiences. This approach facilitates both
cognitive and affective growth of children.

Children also want to be involved in choosing and
planning learning activities. Hymes (1955) asserted that
children have a burning curiosity and like sponges, are
constantly soaking up knowledge. Being involved in choosing
and planning learning activities taps deeply into children's
interests and enhances levels of motivation which, in turn,
increases the chances for student achievement and lessens
the chances for boredom. The explanation is simple.
Children must like their work and are more likely to give
optimum performance if they are involved in the planning

process. A fifth recommendation, therefore, would be to involve children in the planning of classroom activities. This recommendation is supported by Dobson and Dobson's (1976) belief that "children who are actively involved in planning their curriculum usually understand the purpose of the tasks and have some preconceived notions of what the outcomes will be" (p.40).

Another recommendation which comes to mind while reviewing children's attitudes about the learning process stems from the fact that children must feel successful. Children try harder and are more productive when they are meeting with success. I recommend that educators provide for the success of their students. Factors which contribute to the success of the student include: (a) the student's readiness for the task, (b) the student's ability to handle the task, (c) the support which is received from the teacher.

Hymes (1955) pointed out that readiness is built by growth instead of teachers. The teacher, however, is responsible for establishing and maintaining a learning environment which nurtures readiness. An environment which nurtures readiness includes: (a) a positive and loving classroom climate, and (b) a curriculum and (c) curriculum materials designed to build readiness.

The second factor which contributes to the student's success is the student's ability to handle the expected tasks. Tasks which are too difficult lead to frustration

and eventually, a dislike of school. Tasks which are too
easy lead to boredom and disinterest. Observing and
monitoring students' classroom performance, attitude, and
behavior may lead to conclusions about the difficulty of
expected learning tasks. Student assessment and test
information also offer invaluable information about levels
of difficult. These tools help teachers to plan classroom
instruction which is developmentally appropriate for the
student.

The third factor which contributes significantly to
student success is the student's feeling of support from the
teacher. Children in this study pointed out that some
teachers, through their impatience or good intentions,
simply give answers. This practice impedes student
progress. On the other hand, those teachers who patiently
guide students toward understanding, facilitate learning.
Learners, through teachers' support, are encouraged and
inspired to tackle difficult and challenging tasks.

The final recommendation comes directly from the student
research team. After deliberating several problems which
they perceived as being eminent, the team concluded that the
major problems at school were caused by students prejudging
others and manifesting this prejudice through aggressive and
hostile acts. The research team recommended the initiation
of discussion groups comprised of students who are both
victims and perpetrators of prejudice and a teacher leader.
These groups would discuss the problem and engage in role

play to produce a wider awareness of the situation.
Students through group processes would be led toward
reexamining their feelings and attitudes toward others.
Children need others; they need to be liked by others in
order to develop a sense of adequacy about themselves.
Implementation of the recommendation may help to improve
interpersonal relationships.

Conclusions

Two major conclusions evolved from this study. First,
the review of the literature on children's perceptions of
school and the insight about school as received from the
children in this study make it apparent that children and
their perceptions are valuable resources when assessing and
changing the school's state of affairs. Firsthand knowledge
of children's perceptions, descriptions, and interpretations
of the internal life of school brings about a broader
understanding of the school's actual state of affairs and
increases the chances of making meaningful decisions and
necessary changes.

Second, qualitative research approaches such as
observations, autobiographies, interviews, and
deliberations, offer operable alternatives to the
traditional statistical and scientific methods usually used
by quantitative researchers. These alternatives enable

researchers and educators to study school from within its culture and to interact with the people inside a changing context. Data gathered in this manner yield information which is generalizable, and yet specifically meaningful and significant to those at the local school site.

> Most educational research is a search for generalizations across an almost infinite variety of teachers, students, and subjects. In this search for general laws of learning, researchers deliberately hold constant or rule out the specific conditions in any particular classroom. But what the classroom teacher really wants to know is, What is happening in _my_ classroom, given my students and my subject matter (Cross, 1987, p. 499)?

If teachers are to understand what is happening in their classrooms; if the purpose of studying schools is to provide a basis for improving instruction and curriculum, instead of placing blame; and if educators are to improve the quality of student learning; then the reform must start as close as possible to the scene of the action (Cross, 1987). Research practices such as those used in this study provide a means to these ends.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

THOUGHT STIMULATOR

School is sometimes a real neat place to be. Sometimes it is not so neat. Please write a story telling how you feel about school

You may want to think about:

. Your teacher, principal and other people who work in your school

. The subjects that you study and the work that you do

. The other things that you do

. The other boys and girls at your school

. Things you like and do not like about school

. Things that make you feel good in school

. Things that make you feel bad in school

. Your favorite activities in school

. Your least favorite activities

. How your school looks

There may be other things that you want to write about. Relax, think a while and let your thoughts flow.

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE OF AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

Sample One

I feel that school is sometimes fun and sometimes boring. The fun thing about school is some of the subjects we study, like social studies, math and science.

I also like school because of some of my teachers, especially my social studies teacher. I like my social studies teacher because he is funny and he tells neat stories. He also makes work fun and easier. I also like my music teacher. She is lively and full of joy.

The thing that I don't like about school is reading. I like reading but I just don't enjoy reading class. I find it boring and very tiring.

My favorite activities are when we play soccer and basketball in the gym.

I think that your school looks ok, except that I think we should get together one day and plant some flowers and some trees.

I guess I like school pretty much. I like some of the kids but some I just can't stand.

Sample Two

I feel good and sometimes I don't feel good about school. I feel bad because we pay a lot of money for our lunch but we don't get enough food at all. I think it's bad because you can't even whisper at all in the classes.

The good thing we have at this school is that we have very good teachers and a nice principal. I also like the school because it is nice outside and inside and is set up nicely.

I like some of the boys and girls at school because most of them are real nice but I don't like the people that are real mean.

I think the school needs new books because the books we have are sometime ripped or they are mostly written in.

I like P.E. because you can move around freely, whisper, and best of all play all kinds of games. I don't like some of the subjects and I like a few of them. I like science and spelling because in science you can do activities and spelling is just plain simple. I don't like social studies, language, math and reading because they are just plain boring.

I hate it when you have to go to the restroom but your teacher says, "No!" My very favorite activities are P.E. and recess because you move around freely.

APPENDIX C

EXCERPTS FROM INTERVIEWS

(Interview Designed for Autobiography - Sample One Appendix A.)

Interviewer: You started your story off by saying that sometimes school is fun and sometimes it is boring. Talk to me about that. Tell me abut some of the times that school is fun and when it is boring.

Interviewee: I usually have fun when I do my math, because I find it interesting. I also like science and social studies. My teacher helps out because he is fun. It helps a lot because sometimes he makes jokes and it just helps. Sometimes during social studies I find out about a lot of things I never knew about and I asked my Mom if she knew about them and why she never told me about them. And it science, like now, we are studying the human bones and I didn't even know we had that many bones in our body.

Interviewer: In your autobiography you talked about one of your teachers being funny. You said that helped. Does this kind of teacher help more than a more serious teacher?

Interviewee: Sometimes, but then serious teachers help a
              lot also. I had a serious teacher who helped
              out a lot. Sometimes she was nice in one way,
              but then not so nice in another.

Interviewer: What do mean by that?

Interviewee: Sometimes she would get real mad if you did
              not have your assignments and would make you
              stay in for recess and write sentences. I
              hate writing sentences.

Interviewer: You mentioned that one teacher was lively and
              fun of joy, how does that make a difference?

Interviewee: This teacher makes you happy inside when you
              are around her and that makes you like school.

Sample Two

(Interview Designed for Autobiography - Sample Two
Appendix A.)

Interviewer: Tell me some more things that happen in school
              that make you day "not so good."

Interviewee: When I get in trouble and I didn't do it.

Interviewer: Does that happen often?

Interviewee: No, not really.

Interviewer: How do children get blame for things that they
didn't do?

Interviewee: Well, you can just be standing there, and
someone may trip you or something, and the
teacher thinks that you did it.

Interviewer: Are you able to explain this to your teacher?

Interviewee: A lot of times they just don't listen.

Interviewer: How does that make you feel?

Interviewee: Mad

Interviewer: What do you think can be done about that- how
can teachers improve this?

Interviewee: I don't know.

Interviewer: You said in your story, that you think it is
bad when you can't even whisper in class - do
you think that school is too strict?

Interviewee: Yes, sometimes.

Interviewer: You seem to think that we have good teachers.
What make teachers nice?

Interviewee: They don't treat you bad.

Interviewer: What are some ways that teachers treat
children bad?

Interviewee: They give them more work as punishment.

Interviewer: You said that you like some of the boys and girls at school. Tell me about the boys and girls at school.

Interviewee: Some are real mean; some are nice.

Interviewer: What do they do when they are real mean?

Interviewee: They pick on you and call you names.

Interviewer: Tell me about the kids that are nice - what do you mean?

Interviewee: They don't trip you or call you names or be mean to you and things like that.
Excerpts from Group Interview #1

Interviewer: Individually, you have written and said many interesting things different things about school. Today we are going to review some of the things that you said individually. What do you want to talk about first?

Response: Teachers, they get on your nerves. (laughter)

Interviewer: Do you all agree and what did you mean?

Response: 1. I don't not all teachers get on your nerves, some are nice.

2. Yes, but some teachers are nosey

3. They aren't really nosey, they are just
   trying to help.

4. I think that they are nosey, even with
   each other, they are always trying
   find out what going on with other
   people.

Interviewer: How teachers get on your nerves?

Response: They pick on you.

Interviewer: How?

Response: 1. They are always bugging you and wanting
                  you to work.
               2. Isn't that why we come to school (to
                  work)?
               3. Not me - I like to play

Interviewer: Who is in support of teachers and
               schools ?

Response: (All but two of the ten children indicated
               that they were)

Interviewer: Jim, what's wrong with teachers and
               school?

Response: Too much work.

Interviewer: Let's talk more about some of the negative

things about teachers .Then we will discuss

some positive things. What are some negative

things?

Response: They falsely accuse you

Interviewer: Give me an example.

Response: One day, this boy threw a paper wad and the

teacher thought it was me and she got mad

when I told it was not me and just sent me to

the office.

Interviewer: Why did she think it was you?

Response: I guess because it came from by where I was

sitting and no one would own up to it.

Interviewer: How did you feel?

Response: I was mad.

Interviewer: Could the teacher not have made an honest

mistake?

Response: I guess so, but they are always saying things

without really checking them out.

Interviewer: What are some other negative things that you

have noticed about teachers.

Response: They treat different kids different - Like

             if I would wear a muscle shirt then this

             certain teacher would say you shouldn't wear

             that kind of shirt to school--it looks like

             your underwear. But if let's say Frank wore

             a muscle shirt, then this teacher would say -

             "OOOh Frank, what a pretty shirt you have on

             (laughter)

Response: All of the teachers like Frank.

             (Note: Frank is a member of the group and

             appears to be somewhat uncomfortable at this

             point)

Interviewer: Frank, do you mind if we talk about you.

Response: No

Interviewer: Why do you think that the teachers like Frank?

Response: 1. Probably because he never gets in

                trouble and he always does his work

             2. He is quiet too

Interviewer: Do you guys like Frank?

Response: Yes

Interviewer: Then it seems like Frank is just a nice guy.

             Do you find that teachers usually have pets

and is Francis a "pet"

Response: Yes, teachers always have pets. Frank is not a teacher's pet though- he is a regular guy.

Interviewer: What is a teacher's pet?

Response: Someone who is always doing stuff for the teacher.

Interviewer: Who are usually the teacher's pets?

Response: Girls, smart girls

Interviewer: Why smart girls?

Response: Because they never do nothing except do their work.

Interviewer: Do you think that kids want to be the teacher pet?

Response: No, because it ruins your reputation.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Response: The kids will say "You are the teacher's pet, you are the teacher's pet, we aren't going to have anything to do with you" especially if it is a boy.

Interviewer: Let's talk about some positive things

(silence) oh come on I know you can think of

some good things (laughter)

Response: 1. They let you talk and get a way with it.

2. They help you

3. When you finish your work, they let you

goof off.

Interviewer: Do you want to goof off?

Response: (an unanimous YES)

Interviewer: Now, that's not what you told me in your

individual interviews - you told me that

school was a serious place, a place to learn,

a place NOT to goof off.

Response: Who said that? (laughter)

Interviewer: Why do you come to school?

Response: 1. To make friends

2. To be able to get a good job?

3. To learn

4. To be able to go to college

Interviewer: How many people in this group do you think can

be a super star

Response: One

Interviewer: What Would happen to the rest of you

Response: I guess we had better go to school (laughter)

Student Conducted Group Interview

Leader: Art

Members: Shirl, Jim, Shay, Ann, Harry

Art: What do you like about teachers?

Ann: They let you talk

Shirl: They let us play games

Jim: I like teachers when they let you slide, sometimes

Art: I like teachers who help you with your work and who
        care about you and your grades.

Art: Let's name some things we don't like about teachers.

Shirl: I don't like teachers when they pick on kids who
        have been bad in the past and they are always
        yelling at them for things they didn't do.

Ann: When they are prejudice.

Harry: When they blame things on you and you didn't do
        nothing.

Shay: When they yell at the whole class.

Ann: I don't like teachers when they punish the whole
         class.

Jim: Some teachers are nosey, they get into your
         business.

Art: How do you know it's going to be a good day.

Harry: The teacher smiles at you.

Ann: When teachers come in happy.

Art: What are nice teachers?

Shirl: A nice teacher who gives you a few minutes to
         yourself

Art: What's a mean teacher?

Harry: A teacher who always gets on your case

Art: What do you think about fighting?

Ann: I don't think it solves anything

Jim: Fighting is wrong, it just entertains other kids.

APPENDIX D

SAMPLE OF STUDENT DELIBERATION

Leader: On Tuesday we listed problems and symptoms of
        problems within the four categories. Today, I want
        us to come up with just one, that you think is very
        important - important enough for us to spend the
        next three days deliberating, or discussing and
        coming up with a plan of action. Let's review our
        list of problems, then I want individually, without
        talking to each other to come up with one thing. I
        will ask you to defend your choice. We will not
        take a vote, or will not necessarily go with the one
        thing that most people want, one person may be able
        to sway us, for example, Shirl may think that we
        should settle on "keeping the school clean", no one
        else may have chosen that. Shirl, however, may be
        able to change your minds. Let's take a few minutes
        to think about our choices, then write them on a
        piece of paper. You may list anything from our list
        of problems or you might come up with a new problem.
        (After a five minute recess - children will state
        and defend their choice)

Keith: I think that prejudice between kids is the number
        one problem, because if you stop some of the
        prejudice, then you would stop some of the fighting
        and other problems.

Jim: I think that the problem under the learner category
        and is judging people by their looks- because when

kids talk about each other and start talking about the way you look, and the way you talk, and start looking for differences, then that starts fights.

Dan: I think that the problem is fighting because 90% of arguing turns into fighting and if we stop fighting then we would get along better.

Harry: I think that the problem is prejudice because it hurts people's feelings and starts fights and it interferes with your work because people make fun of you and the way you look and you don't feel like doing your work.

Art: I think that the problem is rumors, like people will go around saying you like someone and you really don't and that starts fights.

Jim: I think that it is prejudice, because we are all different, but that shouldn't matter

Londa: I think that is prejudice - because prejudice causes fights and it also keeps you from getting jobs

Leader: What would say about what Londa has said as far as keeping on task is concerned.

Jim: I think that she is probably talking about that if you get into a lot of fights your school work will reflect it. If you don't get along and are not

happy, then you won't feel much like doing a good job in school.

Keith: You will also have a bad attitude about school. Most bad attitudes come from not getting along with others or not feeling liked and if you don't feel that the teacher and other kids like you, you don't do your work as well, because you don't care.

. . . .

Leader: Harry, Shirl, Keith, Jim, Ann, Londa, Shay, all think that prejudice is the number one problem. Do any of you want to change to one of the other problems? Are you convinced that student prejudice is the number one problem?

VITA *2*

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