

ELEMENTARY STUDENT PERCEPTIONS AND BELIEFS
ABOUT COMMON SCHOOL PRACTICES IN
GRADING AND EVALUATION

By

KAREN R. TRAVIS

Bachelor of Science in Education
Southwestern Oklahoma State University
Weatherford, Oklahoma
1970


Master of Education
Southwestern Oklahoma State University
Weatherford, Oklahoma
1976

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate College
of the Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
May, 1991

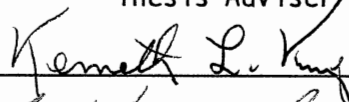
Thesis
1991D
T782e
cop.2

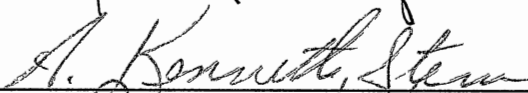
ELEMENTARY STUDENT PERCEPTIONS AND BELIEFS
ABOUT COMMON SCHOOL PRACTICES IN
GRADING AND EVALUATION

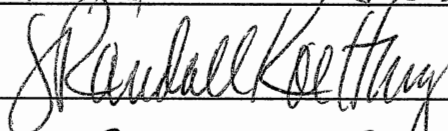
Thesis Approved:



Thesis Adviser









Dean of the Graduate College

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A combination of humbleness and pride are behind my expression of gratitude and appreciation to all involved with the institution of Oklahoma State University through the completion of this research project and my subsequent personal and professional growth. I would like to express my thanks to the members of my dissertation committee: Dr. Kenneth King, Dr. J. Randall Koetting, and Dr. Kenneth Stern, for their guidance, assistance, and support. My thesis adviser, Dr. Russell Dobson, will always call to mind a picture of patience, intellectualism, and genuine example of that which he professes to his students. His support and expert guidance will always be remembered and appreciated.

I would also like to thank my family and friends, who have supported and encouraged me through all my work before and including this research project. My professional peers have lent understanding and interest in this project. My parents and in-laws were always ready to lend support or a helping hand. My daughters have felt some sacrifice, yet have given love and excitement in my accomplishments. They, along with many of my students, have taught me so much that I need to know about children and working with them. To my husband, Robert, go laurels and praise for his sacrifices, patience, and an occasional nudge to go forward. He never withdrew his love, support, and pride in what I was trying to accomplish. This volume is dedicated to Robert and the girls.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.	1
Background of the Study.	1
Purpose of the Study	4
Rationale for the Study.	5
Basic Assumptions.	6
Organization of the Study.	7
Summary.	8
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE.	10
Alternatives	11
Affecting Learning and Psychology.	19
Summary.	25
III. METHODOLOGY	27
Participants	28
Setting.	29
Research Design.	30
Research Methods and Procedures.	31
Participant Observations	34
IV. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS.	36
Description of Research Experience	36
Presentation of the Data	38
V. INTERPRETATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS	58
Interpretations.	59
Recommendations.	64
Conclusions.	66
BIBLIOGRAPHY	68
APPENDIXES	72
APPENDIX A - INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.	73
APPENDIX B - EXCERPTS FROM INTERVIEWS	75

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of Study

The continuing emphasis on school reform and student performance in our state and nation calls for diverse reactions from school administrators, teachers, parents, and students, as well as from the public outside of school confines or concerns. Greater and stronger demands for the improvement of performance of our nation's school children lends pressure to all concerned with schooling. A recent television series expressed this theme with its program entitled, "America's Toughest Assignment: Solving the Education Crisis" (CBS News, 1990). Reports and reforms are in ample supply and give solutions and "fixes" for every imaginable school problem or weakness. On the heels of these suggestions for change and improvement come more and more demands for the schools to be more responsible, more accountable, and more versatile in their encounters with students. These demands are usually brought to fruition in the form of numbers on a state-mandated test and/or scores on a test required for graduation.

In countering some of the demands and requirements placed on public schools in the area of evaluation, Cawelti (1990, p. 2) stated that "Focusing on national standards is less important than firming up the knowledge base schools need to ensure success." Dr. Cawelti referred his arguments to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the

"Nation's Report Card" on student achievement. He stated further that researchers such as Slavin and Comer are searching for and finding ways that can raise student achievement levels. Tutoring plans, cooperative learning, integration of appropriate technology, and active parent involvement make better results possible. Cawelti (1990) stated specifically:

We are much more likely to get results if we determine the conditions that foster high achievement, and then take steps to make schools accountable for providing those conditions and producing high achievement. And we should measure this achievement in ways that are understandable and acceptable to parents in terms of what they want their children to learn. We need more imaginative ways to report on student learning--not more NAEP tests (p. 2).

These "required" scores and numbers (from tests) are actually only the tip of the iceberg. They are a culmination, yet only a part of day-to-day, grading period to grading period, year-to-year evaluation, and grading of student progress. Certain conditions and results are required, yet do not always coincide with what is being taught in school. To make this merger more feasible, schools are pursuing a variety of innovations, including interdisciplinary studies, schools-within-schools, and new means of assessment. These innovations are in response to the dramatic changes in the workplace and the student population (Cawelti, 1990).

Many methods of evaluation and reporting evaluation results have been tried in our education system; some have been used and some have been cast away. More times than not, any option has tended to be a fad followed by essentially the same types of evaluation and grading procedures. Other methods have proved to be very close to or the same conventional rut, with an apparent "cover" as criteria.

The standard classroom with the desks and the 26 kids and the teacher talk and the textbook-homework-worksheet-quiz-test-

report card-A-B-C-D-F syndrome is not cutting it--it's obsolete to all who study it, yet so resistant to all who attempt to change it (Raebeck, 1990, p. 20).

Hopefully, more and more educators are beginning to look at all areas of our schools from the students' point of view. As this happens, perhaps teachers, parents, and administrators will see the need for studying, or at least being aware of, the feelings, perceptions, and opinions of students of all ages toward evaluation and grading systems.

Through a study of elementary students' opinions and suggestions, a framework of evaluation and grading ideas from those who are on the receiving end of these ideas can perhaps be formulated. Although many types of studies have been tried, used, and rated by parents, teachers, and administrators, it is of utmost importance to give students a voice in this matter, since they are the object of grades and the most judged by them. The purpose, importance, and effectiveness of grading and the perceived weight of each is considered valuable and usable information for the purpose of this research and its use in "real life" situations. Shepherd and Ragan (1982) supported this viewpoint, since they believe that the most important phase of curriculum planning takes place when educators and pupils plan together.

Evaluation and grading systems in our public schools seem to be one of the common factors of the systems themselves. It is taken for granted that students (shamefully, more than their work) will be "graded." Although details of grading systems may vary, the "results" are universal in their implications for the well-being and future of students. For many years, students of all ages have been the victims in more ways than the recipients of present grading and evaluation strategies and practices of our school systems. Those on the receiving end of these strategies and practices deserve to have their feelings and opinions voiced to and

known by those who present them, use them, and manipulate them. Jackson (1968) supported this premise as early as 1968, with the idea that we seek to involve students, but the ultimate goal is to benefit them.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain information about the feelings and perceptions of students in an area so greatly emphasized by society--grading and evaluation in public schools. With this information may also be revealed ideas that might render improvements or additions to present grading systems.

This study brings some measure of satisfaction in knowing that students have had a voice in their education. Students, teachers, and administrators might find support (or comfort) in knowing there are others who agree or disagree with the particular philosophies revealed and how they compare to present practices. Eisner (1985) compelled us to adhere to his philosophy of "connoisseurship" and develop the ability to appreciate and act on what we have encountered.

Through teachers, administrators, and other educators who are willing to look at results of the study, the purpose, place, and reality of school might take a more pleasant and significant meaning to students. In spite of the importance of content and subject matter, the greater emphasis should be on the growth and development of students (Combs, 1982). Information gained could lead to meaningful changes in how our students are evaluated and graded. These changes--whether in policy or attitude--could make a difference in student outlook on their school work and how they pursue their learning for a lifetime.

Rationale for the Study

Surely in our present technological age, those of us in the education professions can be open to new and previously well-voiced information and ideas that reveal present problems and how they can be put into better perspective and position for renewal and improvement. There are several reasons why this should "happen." Grades are not always a true indication of what or how much has been learned. Students are often victimized by grades and/or labels, and are trapped by them. Grades promote competition (not bad in itself), but they may be threatening or a cause of low esteem for those who cannot make the grade. Grades also feed a "number happy" society that has little time or regard for other factors that may be important. Several examples can be cited which offer support to the problem. Students who consistently make grade "honor rolls" frequently "qualify" on achievement test scores for "remedial" courses. There seems to be little retention of details tested when material has been merely memorized for test-taking purposes. The same public that demands higher scores and keeping up with other countries is left to interpret numbers for which they know little background or surrounding circumstances. The emphasis on "raising scores" is supported by those who want the schools to "look good," with seemingly little regard for students, and how (or if) they are equipped to pursue lifelong learning.

The concept of grading/evaluation is in itself abstract to many of its recipients. Attaching a letter or number to what has been accomplished is only a part of determining whether or not learning has taken place and/or the extent, limitation, or longevity of that learning situation.

Because of the abstract nature of these types of grading/evaluation systems, students have little choice in the ways they are graded. Learning is not always determined other than in the standard ways it is reported. Students have their own (probably valuable) ideas about how they could or should be evaluated that are never "brought to light." Because these situations exist, the researcher hoped to determine that students feel that learning can be enhanced by their participation in evaluation procedures, that use of student ideas give them a choice in their own learning, and that both learning and its evaluation can be enhanced by use of student ideas and interactions in this areas.

Readers who are interested in this important area of education may find reinforcement for their particular beliefs on the issue. Perhaps just one idea will be born or developed which will cause a potential few to give opportunity for growth of ideas for changing, improving, or instilling new ideas for the grading/evaluation process and the results they can bring. Combs (1982) would agree, since he strongly stressed that content knowledge in teaching is not enough because we behave in terms of our beliefs. Belief in something that is well rooted, so that we have ownership of that idea, also reinforces this particular issue (Sizer, 1985).

Basic Assumptions

Many students who have learned to work within the system will think that popular methods of grading are appropriate and fair. Those who have difficulty succeeding in the system will think otherwise.

This researcher hopes that the results will generate enough interest to instigate thinking about other ways to grade or evaluate--not necessarily to entirely replace present methods--but to enhance or make more

meaningful present methods. The impact may be slow and small, but single sparks, if given the right conditions and considerations, can become fires.

Eight basic assumptions undergird this study. They are:

1. Parents, teachers, administrators, and (most importantly), students, are interested in and concerned about evaluation in the form of grading and reporting procedures.

2. Students are willing to freely express their opinions in an area when in a nonthreatening and accepting atmosphere.

3. Some of those persons who "use" these procedures are open to the input of those most "used" by them, namely students.

4. Self-esteem and respect are important factors in evaluation procedures.

5. It is of great importance to evaluate what is being done rather than who is doing it.

6. Sharing of knowledge between teacher and student is a "two-way street" and is pertinent to evaluation.

7. Evaluation should be appropriate to the subject matter, material "covered," or desired outcomes.

8. Evaluation skills should be possessed by the learner for his use, both inside and outside the classroom.

Organization of the Study

This study has five chapters. Following the present introductory chapter, Chapter II presents the literature which supports this study. The areas discussed are: (1) perceptions and beliefs, and (2) alternatives. Chapter III includes a description of the research procedures used to collect data. Chapter IV presents the data gathered during this

study. Lastly, Chapter V presents the interpretations, implications, and recommendations which evolved from this study.

Summary

Our present decade is an exciting time to be educators. We are witnessing necessary nationwide changes that are substantive and research based. These concepts can bring needed growth, but we do not necessarily need reform (a better word and concept would be "transformation" or "reformation", more positive and descriptive terms for describing the changes we need for school and society in the 1990's) (Raebeck, 1990). ". . . understanding schools is a prerequisite to improving them" (Goodlad, 1984, p. 17). More specifically, and in addition to the strong and attractive declarations of Raebeck and Goodlad, is the concept that we need definitions of goals along with a system of assessment, followed with letting the people at the school level decide how it should be done (Brandt, 1990).

Our defining of goals and letting school levels formulate programs and curricula leads us to believe that we must include our students' ideas in our definitions and formulations. "There is so much to be learned from young people when we allow it to come forth. We do not 'instruct,' we do not 'motivate' students. We do not modify their behavior as if they were laboratory animals" (Raebeck, 1990, p. 20).

Persons inside and outside the teaching profession agree that there are strides and improvements to be made in education. "Most existing school programs are an amalgam of progressive and traditional practices, the best that can be achieved under the circumstances but not fully satisfactory to anyone" (Brandt, 1988, p. 4). Through the expertise and input of all involved in the education of our students, we can strive

toward enhancement of many areas of schooling, especially in the interest of this research in the areas of grading and evaluation. Combs, Avilla, and Purkey (1978) expressed this concern when they stated that we truly learn from tackling real problems with our capacities and finding concrete solutions with which we can live or that can be confronted as further problems for exploration.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

From the viewpoints of parents, teachers, and administrators, one finds evidence of investigation, research, input, and the resulting information, data, and effort in studying grading and evaluation of students. The results, possible and/or tried changes and their effectiveness, have been reported from the standpoint of those not on the receiving end of the grading/evaluation system. Thus, those in the education profession are forming viewpoints and opinions on grading/evaluation systems and procedures with little information or feedback from those who are the "receivers" in the system.

Combs (1982) described open and closed systems in education. He described systems as objective, operational, and outcome assessed (as in the business world). He referred to open systems as those which confront problems and search for solutions. Our present grading system would be a part of a closed system; this research seeks to develop or work toward an open system of evaluation.

In Chapter I, a rationale for seeking input from students on grading/evaluation systems was provided. The importance of possible alternatives, additions, or new concepts for grading/evaluation systems was also stressed. Since there is little evidence of research from students' points of view, this review of literature will consist of descriptions of: (1) possible alternatives to common grading/evaluation

practices, and (2) resources from the realm of affective learning and psychology which lend support for the assumption of the stated problem.

Alternatives

In a recent speech, Eisner (cited in Update, 1990) stated three of his own educational goals for our consideration in comparison with some of those set forth by the National Governor's Association (NGA) which is, in turn, looking to the NAEP for measurement of learner outcomes. Eisner's summarized goals were: (1) teaching students that exploration of ideas is exciting and fun, (2) helping students develop "multiple forms of literacy," and (3) teaching students that they have a "unique and important personal signature" (cited in Update, 1990, p. 4). Eisner admitted that his goals were difficult to measure by traditional standardized methods of assessment and stated that "We need forms of assessment we don't have and are just beginning to get. We need that to develop credibility" (cited in Update, 1990, p. 4). Eisner also suggested the use of student portfolios of work, performances, and displays. He felt that these types of tools are ". . . much more congruent with our most deeply held educational values" (p. 4). Meisler (1990) reported recently that the National Commission on Testing and Public Policy feels that educators and politicians should not depend solely on tests to evaluate schools and students. Instead, ". . . it recommends a wide battery of assessments based on such things as a child's ability to create a school project or prepare a portfolio of work" (p. 9).

An editorial by Brandt (1990) suggested that the competitive grading system common in many schools almost guarantees that large numbers of students will not do their best. He believed that true reform requires that we design the evaluation systems to give students recognition for

what they have learned and not humiliation for what they have not learned. The design of these types of evaluation systems ". . . would put teachers and students on the same side and emphasize outcomes achieved rather than time spent and credits accumulated" (Brandt, 1990, p. 3). Of equal importance is the quality of experiences that students have on a day-to-day basis and how relevant were those experiences sought.

Raffini (1986, p. 54) stated that ". . . in some ways, the school's evaluation system is more brutal than the real world." He based this realization on the fact that "Few in the work force are subjected to the humiliation of norm-referenced evaluation" (p. 54), and suggested the setting aside of norm-referenced evaluation. This idea, according to Raffini, meets considerable opposition because the label of "above average" must be eliminated as well as the label of "below average," if norm-referenced evaluation is not used. Most students in the above average group thrive on competition and may feel that they are cheated if it is not there. To them, the scarcity of an "A" makes it worthwhile (Raffini, 1986).

Goodlad (1974) stated a similar point of view in his book, Looking Behind the Classroom Door, when he stressed flexible standards of evaluation with increasing attention to the actual performance of children rather than comparison with grade, age, or group norms. Further support for lessening the emphasis on normed and standardized instruments is found through the fact that American schools use more standardized tests than do schools in other countries, yet most of the teachers and principals who spend great amounts of time preparing for, giving, and interpreting those tests do not trust them. It becomes apparent in this situation that, "The testing tail is wagging the curriculum dog" (Brandt,

1985, p. 3). These teachers feel they would like to teach, and are perhaps teaching more than is tested, and they are tired of seeing the destruction that can arise through these means of being compared and having children compared.

Marshall (1968) made a similar comparison in a book written in the late sixties. In his conclusion that students, parents, and society assume that grades are based entirely on work, and demand constantly and often to know how the students are "getting along," Marshall stated, "This creates a most unscholarly situation, proving at once that the tale of the grade wags the dogged ways of teaching" (p. 6). Some suggestions for easing this situation involve developing consolidated assessments that serve several functions simultaneously, using more formative testing aimed at individual and program improvement, experimenting with computers to reduce student frustration and save testing time, supporting the measurement of higher order thinking skills as well as basic facts and skills, giving more attention to teacher-developed assessment for classrooms, and gathering and communicating along with parents and citizens evidence besides testing that proves what students are learning (Brandt, 1985).

Stiggins (1985) related the importance of looking into classrooms to find the true picture of what assessment should be. Without this important insight, a simple, reasonable measurement of student achievement could be produced by a multiple-choice test, the results being used to show the public whether or not the schools are doing the job. Those who view assessment from inside the classroom see a different picture. Within the classroom setting, teachers use many kinds of assessments: standardized and individualized, some based on paper and pencil tests, some based on observation and judgment, some formal, and some informal.

The methods vary greatly, depending on purpose, grade level, and subject matter (Stiggins, 1985). Stiggins also pointed to several studies which show that "Teachers depend heavily on their own observations and judgments--not just on paper and pencil tests (p. 69)." These findings make it clear that "Assessments that influence classroom learning and students' academic and personal self-concept are those developed and used by teachers on a daily basis" (Stiggins, 1985, p. 69). The unfortunate outcome of these teacher-based assessments is that they seldom receive publicity, research, or inservice attention. The further result is that students and teachers cannot understand the public, administrative, and research attention given to what means so little to them. Of course, the opposite is true for those who stress the importance of standardized evaluation (Stiggins, 1985). A factor so neglected in this situation is that this type of evaluation in no way covers the range of what is being taught in classrooms, nor the representation of student populations.

Barth (1980) outlined a program for evaluation as he has seen it work from the principal's position. Part of his philosophy can be summarized by the statement that program and pupil evaluation are synonymous and that ". . . a good evaluation system reflects and enhances the philosophy and values of a school" (Barth, 1980, p. 127). Barth also stressed the need for a coherent and agreed-upon policy for evaluation so that the personal and academic growth of a pupil may be seen over a long period of time. He noted the need for students, parents, teachers, and administrators--all of which are responsible for the education--to be responsible also for the evaluation of that education. Barth went so far as to say that "Insufficient weight is given to children and the messages they convey" (p. 130).

The process which Barth (1980) conveyed includes: (1) a written evaluation of each student, (2) use of this evaluation in a parent-teacher conference (twice per year and having been discussed with the student beforehand), (3) the written evaluation placed in the student's cumulative folder with a copy sent home to the parent, (4) a copy of the evaluation given to the principal (Barth) to read. Checklists, scales, or any other additional methods for conveying information may be used if desired. This type of evaluation is more meaningful to students than a letter grade or similar type symbol, removes some of the mystery from evaluation, and is more accurate than symbol evaluation methods, all of which can be factors in change and improvement in the behavior of a student. The possibility for remedy involved in such a system far outweighs the factor of accountability (Barth, 1980).

Barth (1980) also firmly believed that evaluation is a school decision (Goodlad, 1984, would agree), and that decision for a particular method should be the responsibility of parents, students, and principals. Each school should have an evaluation system that reflects uniformity with a school philosophy in order to be more effective and creative than national, state, and even local evaluation systems (Barth, 1980).

A 1977 study done by Cassidy revealed that the least important factor to parents and teachers in reporting the progress of reading students was letter grades or symbols. Other factors, such as ways students could be helped to improve, and their attitudes and behaviors in the classroom situation, ranked high in both teacher and parents responses. The same study revealed that report cards in connection with parent-teacher conferences were the main means of reporting reading progress (Cassidy, 1977).

Burton (1983) authored a paper which studied the letter grade system and its effect on curriculum. His research findings revealed that many elementary teachers gave letter grades because it was required by the district, and parents required it. These teachers felt that the power in such decisions was somewhere outside their control. Their attitudes fell into three main categories: (1) opposition to letter grades and desire to adopt process rather than product, (2) feeling that letter grade systems are arbitrary and a remnant of educational past, and (3) possession of attitude of being locked in by the college system. The study was carried out in four main areas of rationales, interpretations, consequences, and alternatives to the letter grade system. The alternatives section of the study revealed a desire on the part of teachers to use checklist, written progress reports, and parent-teacher conferences rather than the letter grade system of reporting. Several teachers at all levels of the curriculum suggested that these alternatives be used to supplement the letter grade system rather than replace it. In the hidden curriculum area, responses from students indicated that they were seemingly taught that the most important matter was to obtain points for a letter grade and that in itself tended to make them focus on ". . . finishing work as opposed to what they were learning or wanting to learn" (Burton, 1983, p. 5).

A study by Gullickson (1985), which investigated teacher evaluation practices to determine which techniques are used by teachers and the emphasis on them, divided the roles of evaluation into test and nontest techniques. The techniques varied from four types of tests to class discussions and oral reports, notebooks, projects, and laboratory projects, and eventually even to citizenship and behavior, both in the school and community setting. When results were tabulated in the elementary

section of the survey, nontest items were found to be in the most prominently used roles. Class discussion, student papers, and student behavior had a higher priority for evaluation than did tests. These types of evaluation tend to be viewed by some as less reliable than tests, but Gullickson (1985) felt that if they are the choice of so many teachers, then measurement professors should provide careful instruction in these areas.

A study similar to Gullickson's (1985), but which was conducted in a college of education by Rathis, Healy, and Della-Planka in 1985, analyzed some of the problems in assigning grades to students. Practices were found that could ease some of the problems experienced by both teachers and students. Findings from this survey were divided into prevalent practices and promising practices. The promising practices were of most utilization to the purposes stated and included giving students opportunity to evaluate the type of work they were doing themselves, returning written assignments promptly for greatest helpful feedback, making exemplary examples of work available along with comments as to what made it exemplary, and giving opportunity to retake tests or rewrite assignments if they fell below the "A" level (Rathis, Healy, and Della-Planka, 1985).

Through a study done by Yarborough and Johnson (1980), it was revealed that much harm can be done to students through using a "marking" system of evaluation if these students are labeled as failures through the marking system when they are doing the best they can. The study also revealed that marks do not contribute much to any student's progress. The conclusion that followed was that if marks do not particularly enhance and may be detrimental to others, why are they being used? "Brighter children can be rewarded for achievement in a number of ways, but the harm done to slower pupils . . . may forever deprive them of

gains possible in mark-free elementary schools" (Yarborough and Johnson, 1980, p. 528).

Experimentation with and successful use of self-evaluation is described in an article by Rief (1990). She has made successful use of student portfolios for evaluation purposes in a middle school situation. With this particular method, the teacher sets external criteria such as writing assignments, self-evaluation of what and how the student is doing, and year-end reading/writing projects. The students decide what they will read, what they will write, and what they need to work on to improve. They also select what they think is their best writing effort and decide why. When all the information necessary is placed in a portfolio, the teacher writes a narrative on the student's growth as a learner. This gives positive response to the owner of the portfolio. The students are given questions as a help in evaluating their own work, as well as whether or not their own goals (set at the beginning) have been met. The students are free to include in their portfolios only what they feel is their best work and leave out what, to them, is not. Rief (1990) felt that she could learn more about her students' work and progress through this method than she could through set curriculums and standardized tests. She felt that it is a type of evaluation that matters, because it matters for students.

Good and Brophy (1973) supported the idea of self-evaluation in their book, Looking in Classrooms. This can be done not only for looking again at written work, but also for reactions to student questions. Also emphasized is the building of relationships and trusts and appropriate limits in order to make such an activity successful.

An interesting and thought-provoking book called Wad-Ja-Get? by Kirschenbaum, Simon, and Napier (1971) tells the story of a group of

students and a very interested, far-sighted, and patient teacher who takes a comprehensive look at grading systems, involving the faculty, school, parents, and community in a study and eventual change in the grading system of some of their coursework. Through narrative in the body of the book, the students do their "homework" on the history and various methods of grading. This information is "backed up" at the end of the book with an appendix that gives an in-depth list of grading methods along with advantages and disadvantages listed about each method. The methods of grading included in this work are: (1) written evaluation; (2) self-evaluation; (3) give grades, but don't tell the students; (4) contract system; (5) the "mastery approach" or "performance curriculum" (five-point system); (6) pass/fail grading (two-point mastery approach: (a) modified P/F, (b) limited P/F); (7) credit/no credit grading; and (8) blanket grading (Kirschenbaum, Simon, and Napier, 1971). This work is not only comprehensive but informative, rational, and personal as well.

Affecting Learning and Psychology

The second part of this literature review contains information and support from the affective realm of learning and psychology, which lend themselves to the subject under consideration. The authors are those who are considered to be masters in their field, some of whose writings only are still alive to speak to us, and some whose voices can be heard and are being attended to by educators, students, and parents even as this keyboarding is being accomplished.

Nearly 20 years ago, Rogers (1971, p. 65) said, "Forget you are a teacher . . . be a facilitator of learning." "Teachers have the responsibility to make education relevant and interesting . . . students have

the responsibility to attend class, to study, and to learn" (Glasser, 1969, p. 233). "Teachers are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" (Montagu, 1950, p. 107). "Teachers must come to the realization that teachers do not teach, but the learner learns" (Kelly and Rasey, 1952, p. 76). "Human growth takes place in one direction when the learner is having things done to him and in another when things are being done with him" (Kelley and Rasey, 1952, p. 141). Dobson and Dobson (1981) would add a third category as they described different fields of curriculum thought as what we do to, for, and with students. "We get them in kindergarten, exclamation points and question marks. We turn them out in the twelfth grade, plain periods" (Kelley and Rasey, 1952, p. 187). "Teaching is a human business, and the methods employed must be those which add to the human qualities of the learner" (Kelley and Rasey, 1952, p. 153). "We have hundreds of reasons for or against this or that study, but no reason. The things of the spirit do not lend themselves easily to quantitative measurement" (Dewey, 1902, p. 18). "It is folly to suppose we can carry on the education of the child apart from the education of the teachers" (Dewey, 1902, p. 34). The theme of this work of Dewey's is the fourth "R," human relations.

The preceding paragraph may seem to be a hodge-podge of unrelated and nonsensical quotes when listed in such a manner; however, all have a bearing if given careful thought as to how we evaluate students in an educational situation. Wigginton (1990), who built a program that is still working and workable today on a Dewey method outlined in 1917, says that "Learning is basically a social enterprise, and all the great educational philosophers have reiterated that point over and over again (p. 35). Evaluation and grading as parts of learning (we are doomed if they are not) would naturally follow as part of the social enterprise

expounded by Wigginton. Society is made up of humans and we would do well to look carefully at the social enterprise of education in a humane and unselfish way.

Costa (1989) outlined a plan by which this ideal may become more feasible and also included ways in which we can meet the challenge of the information age. He felt that assessment must be redesigned to overcome our habit of using product-oriented techniques to measure process-oriented education. Four basic "musts" are outlined by Costa to accomplish this goal:

1. We must re-establish the school as the locus of accountability.
2. We must expand the range and variety of the assessment techniques we use (direct observation, student portfolios, long-term projects, logs and journals, student interviews, videotapes of student performance, writing samples, all of which give a truer and clearer picture of student growth than standardized test scores alone). We should include teacher assessments in this group, as an enlightened teacher is the best evaluator of students' growth in process learning, especially in areas of application, transfer of knowledge, cooperation, persistence, and creativity.
3. We must work to systematize this variety of assessment procedures.
4. We must re-educate legislators, parents, board members, and community to help them understand that standardized test scores are inadequate indicators of the quality of schools, teachers, and students (Costa, 1989).

The ultimate idea is that "We must constantly remind ourselves that the ultimate purpose of evaluation is to enable students to evaluate themselves" (Costa, 1989, p. 2). This is a major goal of education.

Eisner (1988, p. 25), in an effort to ". . . learn about the schools from the inside, that is, from the perspectives of those who spend a major portion of their lives there," stated that

The aim of curriculum and teaching is not simply to help students meet the demands of schooling, but to help them use what they learn to meet the demands of life. We must move away from programs and methods and incentives that breed short-term compliance and short-term memory (p. 27).

As a part of this aim, Eisner stressed that what we evaluate and how we evaluate has a great impact on what we pay attention to in school. He believed that balanced curriculum and better teaching cannot be achieved if evaluation methods contradict or are inconsistent with our aims. Difficulty also arises in expecting teachers and administrators to be seriously attentive to one kind of educational aim and accountable for another (Eisner, 1988).

Eisner (1988) again attacked "our standard evaluation mechanisms" as a narrow range of achievement tests, and stated that they are inconsistent with what we need. Reasons for this included that they are too narrow, they neglect personal forms of achievement, they foster an instrumental view of education, and they direct our students' attention to very limited goals. In answer to these limits of our evaluation systems, Eisner called for one of our major tasks to be the invention of better ways to reveal to the public what we are doing as professionals and how their students are doing as students. Even though the public has a right to know, we have not made a great deal of headway in inventing such methods (Eisner, 1988).

Supportive of this need expressed by Eisner (1988) is the idea that more important things exist than those quantitative in nature (Brown, 1984). According to Brown, these things are human--the relationships, beliefs, and myths that exist in the personal cultures of businesses and

schools. "We're finding that change must come out of the culture of the school, one school at a time" (Brown, 1984, p. 11).

Within individual schools, evaluation methods have caused more anguish and confusion to parents and more consternation from school personnel than any other aspect of the educational process (Rayder, 1978). Rayder was convincing in his reasoning for such anguish, confusion, and consternation as he outlined the need and reasoning for isomorphic validity in the evaluation process. He admonished educators that whatever educational model we use in teaching should be followed or enhanced by the same type model in evaluation. In other words, the educational process must be isomorphically valid with the evaluation process; a student must be treated the same way in the evaluation process as in the educational process. Failure to follow this line of reasoning can result in so much stress and confusion to those involved in the evaluation process that any educational benefits gained may be undone (Rayder, 1978). To be more specific:

. . . if the educational model encourages the learner to take an active part in the educational process, then the program evaluation must allow the learners and other stakeholders an active part in its determination as well. Or, if the educational model encourages learners to gain their knowledge in a variety of ways, then the evaluation procedures must include a variety of ways for the learner to demonstrate that knowledge. The way learners are treated in the evaluation procedures should be consistent with the way learners are treated in the educational model (Rayder, 1978, p. 14).

While Rayder (1978) tells us of the inconsistency and confusion that can be brought about by the misuse of evaluation in school, Kelley and Rasey (1952, p. 138) stated that evaluation is the ". . . greatest undeveloped frontier in education today." Although written almost 30 years ago, this statement is still true and the criticisms of evaluation given by these authors at the same time are still present in our education

system. These criticisms are: (1) too much time is spent for evaluation, (2) evaluation is mostly objective, (3) evaluation is not carried out in terms of purpose, (4) symbols such as A, B, and C have no meaning, (5) too much emphasis is placed on standardized testing, and (6) evaluation is not rethought as a matter of standards.

In a study of attitudes, knowledge bases, and practices of student teachers and cooperating teachers, evaluation and pupil progress were found to be approached with "puzzlement and concern." Most teachers in the study felt the need for ongoing formal evaluation, but felt a true dichotomy in balancing the school district demands for grading with pupil needs for affirmation and guidance. Conclusions included the need for teachers to be trained in evaluation processes and procedures in order for positive quality evaluation to be possible (Barnes, 1986). (How sad it is that many teachers "miss out" on alternative grading methods and outlooks until they have been in the field for many years.)

Schryer (1987) described a method of developing new attitudes for evaluation through the use of Paolo Friere's The Politics of Education:

Friere advocates that the evaluator and the learner join in evaluation, thus establishing distance from the work under consideration and achieving one of the central goals of education--demystification of inherently ideological codes (p. 1).

(Surely there is room in higher education for at least some exposure to different grading philosophies and methods for those who are preparing to be teachers.)

In their book, Wad-Ja-Get?, Kirschenbaum, Simon, and Napier (1971) described from actual experiences with students those students' reactions to getting grades. The four main reactions were that grades emphasize learning that can be graded easily, grades turn students into robots, grades are not fair, and grades encourage cheating. They also brought

out the idea that "Grades become inextricably tied to a person's sense of his own worth" (p. 84), and that this is one of grading's most harmful aspects.

As early as 1949, Snygg and Combs commented on the abandonment of the marking system. They strongly expressed that such an abandonment would not mean evaluation would be eliminated from the schools, but that such a change would create an atmosphere for children in which they would feel freer from threat and fear of low marks and therefore be more able to recognize defects in their own work and to accept responsibility for them. In addition, teachers were found to have discovered that the most effective type of evaluation is that in which the child evaluates himself in an atmosphere free of threat and with a sympathetic adult. This type of adult role could not be played by a policeman or taskmaster (but hopefully, by a teacher trained and informed of its possibilities) (Snygg and Combs, 1949).

In a 1976 work edited by Simon and Bellanca, many different facets of grading myths are addressed. The two editors contributed to the articles, as well as authors already cited, such as Combs and Kirschenbaum. The book deals with issues of grading and asks the question as to whether the purpose of evaluation is to grade or to learn. The second part of the work presents the arguments by researching the myths of grading and comparing the alternatives. These presentations are followed by alternative suggestions for grading that work and for changing the system (Simon and Bellanca, 1976). This publication efficiently brings together ideas for alternative grading as they are supported by affective psychology and learning.

Summary

In this chapter, the researcher has explored: (1) alternatives to

present grading systems, and (2) affective learning and psychology research to support such alternatives and accompanying philosophies. These two areas served a twofold purpose of giving information available and for support and reference to this information, thus lending ideas for application and understanding to student perceptions of the stated research problem.

Deutsch (1979, p. 393) stated: "It [formal evaluation represented by marking or grading students] is the basic currency of our educational system and among the most salient experiences of school life." Engleberg and Evans (1986) stated that little research has been done on students' attitudes and understanding of grading, despite the importance of grading. Through the background of this chapter and a study from students' points of view, a deeper and broader understanding of the research will, hopefully, emerge.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Students' perceptions of evaluation and grading systems are fundamental to our understanding what is reality from their viewpoints. We have in this area, however (as in many areas of schooling), failed to take into account this important information and the enlightenment it can bring to our study and understanding of the subject of evaluation and grading in schools from the perceptions of students. The primary purpose of this study was to look at grading and evaluation procedures and methods through the responses of children who are the students involved in and the object of these procedures and methods. A study of this nature requires research which has not been common and/or traditional in the educational field.

The rationale and assumptions foundational to this study, plus the importance of students' roles in the research process, do not lend themselves to measurement, predictability, standardized outcomes, or scientific solutions. Thus, qualitative methods and procedures were chosen for this study.

The methods chosen included the phenomenological perspective of qualitative methods. With this technique, the researchers do not ". . . assume they know what things mean to the people they are studying" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1983, p. 31). Rather, "They attempt to gain entry into the conceptual world of their subjects, in order to understand how and what meaning they construct around events in their daily lives" (p. 31).

This process can be aided by the researchers' entry ". . . into the defining process through such methods as participant observation" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1983, p. 33). Ethnography is also a factor, as the responses to the stated problem of the study involved interaction between the culture of schooling and the meanings the participants attributed to certain events. Ethnomethodology is also present to some extent as the study sought to discover how participants understood, used, and ordered aspects of their environment, in this case, that of grading and evaluation techniques (Bogdan and Biklen, 1983). As stated by Bogdan and Biklen (1983):

Qualitative researchers attempt to expand rather than confine understanding. They do not attempt to resolve such ambiguity by seeing the differences as a 'mistake,' and so attempt to establish a standard definition. Rather, they seek to study the concept as it is understood in the context of all those who use it (p. 38).

The methods and procedures used for this study are discussed in this chapter.

Participants

In this qualitative research study, both the researcher and the subjects were involved in the research process. Subjects sought to give thoughtful answers in response to questions asked by the researcher.

Subjects

Two groups of subjects were used for this study. The first was a pilot group. It consisted of 17 sixth graders who were: (1) children interested in participating in the research procedure, (2) children of varied socioeconomic levels, and (3) children with a variety of academic/scholastic abilities as well as behavior histories. There were nine boys

and eight girls, and a racial composition of 14 Caucasian, two Spanish-American, and one American Indian.

The second group of subjects for this research consisted of 22 fifth and sixth graders who were also: (1) interested in participating in the research project, (2) varied in socioeconomic levels, and (3) varied in scholastic/academic abilities and behavioral histories. There were 13 boys and 9 girls, with a racial composition of 20 Caucasian and 2 American Indian.

Fifth and sixth grade students were chosen because of their accumulated background time in the public school setting and their abilities, as observed through the principal researcher's experiences, and closeness to them to comprehend questions asked and thoughtful answers given in the form of perceptions and beliefs about the subject under study.

Principal Researcher

The role of participant observer during the entire research procedure was assumed by the researcher. According to Gage (1977), a participant observer becomes part of the situation which is being observed. The responsibilities as a participant observer included: (1) interviewing individual children, (2) conducting group interviews, (3) summarizing and interpreting data, and (4) making recommendations based on the research findings.

Setting

There were two settings used for this study: one for the pilot group and one for the actual group. Both groups were in elementary schools of the conventional self-contained classroom nature in west central Oklahoma. The two schools are 15 miles apart, are organized in a

similar manner, are of similar size, and the two settings (their own) were used respectively for each group in the research procedure.

The school for the pilot group consisted of 173 students organized in K-6 classes. There were two sixth grade classes in this organization, and one of the classes was chosen randomly for the pilot group in the study. The school for the actual group consisted of 90 students in grades K-6. The fifth and sixth grade classes were chosen to participate in the study. Both elementary schools in the study were and continue to be a part of a K-12 organization in a "one campus" area of the towns involved.

The majority of students in both schools have spent their entire school careers in the settings in which they participated in the research procedure. This could possibly be a factor in the outcome of the data itself, as well as lending to a comfortable, secure, and well-known setting for participation in the research procedure.

Research Design

Collection of data for this research utilized descriptive research methods and procedures. "Descriptive research is designed to determine and to report the way things are" (Mayes, 1987, p. 45). To determine the way things are involves collecting data to answer questions about ". . . the current states of subjects, settings, and situations" (Mayes, 1987, p. 45). Data was collected through individual interviews, group interviews, and participant observation, which are characteristic of phenomenological, ethnographic, and ethnomethodologic of qualitative research methods (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982). The interview questions were written and chosen by the principal researcher. New questions were based on extensive review of literature, as well as on the experience and background

of the researcher. They were considered to be pertinent and relative to the research design and type of data sought.

Research Methods and Procedures

This project was conducted in three phases. During the first phase, children's answers to interview questions as a pilot program situation were collected. In phase two, the same interview questions to interview the actual group as individuals were used. The third phase consisted of a group interview situation of the same questions and format in which students shared, compared, defended, and argued their points in answer to the questions. After the pilot group interviews were completed, the information received and the experience itself revealed to the researcher that a different order to the questions asked would be appropriate and beneficial to the interviewees' understanding of and responses to the questions. The second and third phases of the research, or the actual group interviews, were then conducted with the revised order of the questions. The pilot group research and data provided impetus and clarification to the purposes and goals of the researcher for the collecting of data with the actual group.

Procedure

During the first phase of the project, interviews were conducted by asking questions of a group of students (the pilot group) in a group setting. The group's own classroom was used, but their teacher was not present. The researcher acted as questioner and observer, and no other adults were present. The group felt comfortable in a familiar setting, did not seem threatened in any way, and actually appeared anxious to become involved in the activity. They were assured that they could speak

freely within the group and that their comments would not be used in connection with their names. A second session was held with this group, as they were interested in the topic and had more to offer to the situation than one interview time would allow. These interviews were done in two 30-minute (approximate) sessions.

During the second phase of the project, the second group of students were interviewed--this time on an individual, one-to-one basis. They, too, were in their regular school setting with no other adults present, other than the interviewer. They had the same opportunity to speak freely and were asked the same questions as the pilot group. These interviews lasted an average of 10 minutes per student.

In the project's third phase, the second group of students were interviewed in a group situation in which they were asked to answer the same questions, but in a group setting. The group was again in a familiar classroom setting and spoke freely in response to the interview questions. During the group interview, students were asked to explain, classify, extend, or even change (if desired) their answers to the individual interviews.

This particular process of interviewing followed the characteristics of qualitative research as outlined by Bogdan and Biklen (1982), in that it: (1) had a natural setting, was the direct source of data, and the researcher was the key instrument; (2) was descriptive, (3) was concerned with process rather than product only, (4) analyzed data inductively, and (5) had essential concern for meaning. The regular, familiar school setting was used for the interviewing process and the interviewer asked questions relative to the type of information desired for the research process. The interviewer was able to "drift" from the direct questions as necessary and probe further as necessary or feasible to clarify and

help students clarify what they wanted to say to the interviewer and to each other. The participants were able many times to speak about their ideas more easily, efficiently, and effectively than they possibly could have written about them.

One disadvantage of the use of interviews is that the interview material can be very time consuming to transcribe and organize after it is transcribed. The possibility also exists that the researcher would interpret responses as those that were thought to be wanted to either agree or disagree according to the need of the study. To this researcher, however, the disadvantages were outweighed by the type of information that can be received and its possibilities for the type of research being conducted.

Summary

The primary purpose of the interviews was the collection of data for this research procedure and to observe during the collection of data and following the interviews the perceptions of students about the chosen subject. Nonstructured, open-ended questions made up a part of the interview questions. Sample questions were: "What comes to your mind when you think about the word 'grades'?" and "What would you do to make the way you are graded better?" These types of questions helped to determine subjective effects of getting grades and being evaluated in school.

Bogden and Biklen (1982, p. 136) stated that "Good interviews are ones in which the subjects are at ease and talk freely about their points of view. Good interviews produce rich data filled with words that reveal the respondent's perspectives." Carson (1986) supported this concept in his studies on conversational research:

Fundamentally, conversational research as practiced in these studies makes possible a deeper understanding of the reality of our situations as educators. These conversations go beyond mere explanation to demonstrate that our assumptions that we may exert total control over the educational process is illusory. By appropriating this understanding to our lives as educators, we learn humility and reveal afresh some old insights. We see that beyond the policy statements and directives of curricula there lurks a more basic meaning of teaching as a deeply moral human activity.

In the final analysis, the practice of conducting conversations with participants is in itself a form of action which helps forge a reformed practice. By engaging in conversation researchers are helping to create spaces within educational institutions for thoughtful reflection oriented towards improving practice (p. 84).

It is the opinion of this researcher that the study helped to enhance and support these positions about interviews as methods of studying research areas such as those in this project.

Data collected were transcribed to paper from recordings and then were grouped in a systematic way to categorize according to the questions asked and the type of responses received. Excerpts from the interviews may be found in Appendix B.

Participant Observations

Throughout this research project, participant observation was carried out by the researcher as an ethnographical method to gain needed data.

Procedure

The researcher's role as a participant observer took the form of one who questions, classifies, facilitates, and leads throughout the experience. The subjects of and the researcher in the experience exhibited a mutual respect and openness for this observation.

Summary

The observations in addition to spoken data in the research project allowed data to enhance Chapter IV as well as provide more complete background for the interpretations and recommendations of Chapter V.

CHAPTER IV

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This chapter contains a description of research experiences and a summary of the data. The qualitative techniques of group interviews and individual interviews, in pilot and actual groups of students, were used to gather the data. These techniques, along with the observations of the researcher, both during the actual interviews and the transcription of the interviews, gave guidance toward an understanding of children's perceptions and beliefs about common school grading practices.

Description of Research Experience

Through arrangements made with an elementary principal, a teacher, and a class of sixth graders, an interview was held in the classroom of the children. All involved in the arrangement knew the researcher was coming and why. The classroom teacher left the researcher with the students, and chairs were arranged in a semi-circle to begin the interview. The students seemed eager to be able to help in the research. All who wanted to add to the answering of questions were given an opportunity to do so, but none were forced to talk. Even those who did not say anything at first seemed attentive to what was happening around them. The students were encouraged to let their thoughts flow and to respond as they truly felt. They were informed that there were no "right" or "wrong" answers, and that their opinions were highly respected and desired. The researcher stated: "I want to know what you really think."

The students responded so well, and had so much to offer, that a second session was scheduled. The students, when asked about continuing the interview another time, readily agreed, as did their classroom teacher and principal.

At the beginning of the second interview, the students seemed just as anxious, if not more so, to get into the activity. Responses from the first interview were reviewed, and students were given opportunity to review, clarify, and even change their minds about what had been said in the first interview. With this opportunity taken, the discussion continued with more questions. Very few children did not respond or offer some opinion. Most children gave answers without apology and with clear and understandable use of semantics. The group continued throughout the interview to take the activity seriously, to maintain interest, and to give frank and candid answers or comments to the questions.

In response to others in the group, both pilot and actual, several students replied: "I know what you mean but . . .," or "I agree and/or disagree with _____ because _____." These types of responses were possible (and also respected within the group) because of the open-ended type of questions and questioning method. This group attitude also facilitated more probing from the researcher in the form of such questions as: "Do you mean _____?," "What if?," "Give me an example," and "Tell me more." These prompters were used in the pilot group interviews, individual interviews, and actual group interviews.

Arrangements, preparations, responses, and general attitude about the project were the same, or were very similar in phase two and phase three of the project. The only exception was that the individual interviews in phase two allowed for even greater in-depth probing and time allowance for answers on a one-to-one basis.

Presentation of the Data

The data in this study were organized according to the answers or reactions to questions, while at the same time comparing the interviews of the pilot group, the individuals, and the actual group. The questions that were asked and their responses follow.

"What comes to your mind when you hear the word 'grades?'" This question involved a "brainstorming" situation. Students in the pilot group responded with such answers as "100," "numbers," "doing good," "the honor roll," "make good grades," and "try your best." They also were reminded that it meant how well they did on a sheet, or if they had to study something enough to know it for a test. This particular group was thoughtful at this point and throughout the interviews about "parent signatures." This was a system characteristic of this classroom in which any paper or assignment with a failing grade was sent home to be signed by a parent and was required to be returned to school by the student.

The actual group of individual interviews naturally gave more information and reaction to this question, but not unlike the type of information expressed in the pilot group. One or two of the students were concerned about failing or going to the next grade, while at the same time their first reaction to the question was "straight A's." In the same vein, one student worried about and was afraid of getting low grades. She got nervous about grades, did not think her abilities were good, and thought adjustment to a new school was part of her perceptions about grades. She stated, "I get nervous when I get my report card at the end of the school year." In opposition to this position, one student's reaction to the question was: ". . . how smart the teacher thinks you are." Several students stated that the word "grades" made them think

of school, making good grades, work, books, and classmates. One stated that his grades could be better.

One of the three most frequent answers to this question dealt with the reward/punishment areas of grading. These reactions varied from being on the honor roll to being grounded if grades were not what they should be, or getting to do something special if they were what they should be. One student said that grades were a reminder for him to "stay out of trouble." Another stated, ". . . make straight A's, your family's happy." An additional frequent response to the question was how high or low grades were as far as actual assignments or "papers" were concerned and ". . . what I'm going to make."

The most frequently given response to this question dealt with grade's involvement in getting a good education, getting scholarships and going to college, and future job opportunities such as being a scientist or mathematician. One student said: "Grades are not the most important thing in the world, but they are important."

"Do you think you should have to be graded on your school work? If not, why should you be required to do your school work?" When asked whether or not they should be graded on their school work, the pilot group gave a mixed reaction of positive and negative. Further discussion brought no reason for not being graded, but reasons for being graded were to tell what has been learned, records for college and how good an education is being obtained, and finding out if you know enough to get a good job.

In the actual group of individual interviews, students generally felt that they should be graded on their school work, with some variation in reasons. One student said: "You have to get goin' and learn your stuff," while another stated that she should get grades so that her

"Grandma could give her money for A's." Between this dichotomy of responses came the reasoning that grades show that somebody cares if students are right or wrong, let students know if they are right or wrong, and carry over away from school in knowing if they are right, or "know" something. More than one response came in the form of grades giving ideas about the capabilities of students and whether or not they are doing as well as they could do. Several students said that grades let students know how to do things, that they were learning, and how they were doing in school. The need for grades for colleges (" . . . so they'll know how you've done") and scholarship opportunities were an answer to this question also.

The motivation factor of grades was mentioned several times with such ideas as grades make one try harder, students do not do as well if they are not graded ("slap down anything"), need for school would be absent without grades, learning what you want to learn would not be possible, and students would not know the right answers. A common response for being graded on school work was so that students would "know how to do it." The most common answer to this question from this group was that grading of school work was necessary for promotion purposes and for advancing to the next level of the system.

A few interesting answers were given for reasons not to grade school work. One student felt that parents look at individual papers without understanding the effort made to do them, and for this reason such work was not important to them. Report card grades, however, were very important to these parents. The most common answer for not grading school work was because these specific students said that they made bad grades, or that their grades were not good. A student not in favor of grades said, ". . . [it] should be on how hard you try. If someone makes a good

grade and you make a bad grade, you feel like you didn't try your hardest." Another student in favor of no grades reasoned that, ". . . because if I make bad grades I get in trouble, and I don't like getting in trouble. It just makes me real nervous." The same student said that the reason for doing school work if it were not graded would be ". . . to see what you know, what you don't know, what's your best subject--then you could work on what you don't know."

When the actual group was interviewed as a whole, they still felt that most of their school work should be graded. They did decide, however, that poorer work should not be graded, especially if there were a lot of poorer papers. They suggested getting grades on better papers if they were extra work, or if they got a second chance, to use the best grades.

"How do you think grades are fair? Unfair?" When asked this question, students in all three phases of the study gave a wide variety of responses. The pilot group felt that grades were not fair for students with learning problems if no adjustments were made in the classroom. They also felt it was unfair for students to have to go to special classes if they "messed up" one time. Grading was also considered to be unfair to those who work at different speeds and to new students who may not be familiar with the routine. This group also felt that pop quizzes were unfair if there had been no discussion or reading of material to back them up, or if they had to be taken the day a student came back to school after an illness. Unfairness was felt in grading of certain types of questions, especially "thought"-type questions. It was felt that questions that asked, "What do you think?" were sometimes graded unfairly, ". . . 'cause what you think may be different than what the answer really is." According to the students, these types of questions

could be graded more fairly if the answers were thought out carefully, made sense, and went along with the subject.

These students felt some areas of grading were fair if certain things were taken into consideration. One of those things was that if parents helped students and told them the wrong thing, this should be taken into account when the student was graded on the assignment. They also recognized that judging the fairness of grading was dependent on knowing that rules and procedures for certain special grading situations (such as some of those mentioned previously) varied from teacher to teacher.

This group expressed concern for unfairness to those students who made poor grades, but could not make any better, and were criticized by fellow students. As one group member stated: "They decide they just as well not try; they just skip out."

The actual group individual interviews brought out more doubt within the students' minds as to whether grades were fair or unfair. Many times they felt grades were sometimes fair, sometimes not fair. Some felt very strongly one way or another, but gave no specific reason why.

This group expressed the thought that grades might not be fair if no instruction or content were presented by the teacher. In these situations, they felt that it was easy to make mistakes and it was better to talk with the teacher before being ready for a grading situation. If work required only a few answers, and left little opportunity for a good grade if only a few items were "missed," an unfair situation was thought to exist.

Concern was also expressed in the unfairness of grades as the criteria, making students repeat a grade if they did not want to. Along with this concern if fairness was the expression, "They would make fun of

me." The grading of items such as book reports or other assignments in which there is no specific right or wrong answers were considered at times to be unfair.

Two sixth graders felt they should not be judged by numbers of by comparison of one subject's grade or accomplishment compared to a different subject. One also felt the "grading scale" for public school should be the same as that for college. The greatest concern in this area for this group was in the lack of fairness of grading if students had done their best and still did not make a "good" grade. One student, however, did express an opinion that this situation might make him try harder and do better.

Several students of this group did express the idea that grades/grading was fair, especially if they worked hard, tried their best, and made good grades. One even expressed the idea that he would only be hurting himself if he did not make these efforts. More than one student stated that grades were fair "most of the time," especially, as one student said, ". . . if the teacher shows me how and I do it wrong anyway." Several felt that grades were fair when they were "good," and one felt that they were fair because of their necessity for scholarship possibilities. Clear-cut right or wrong answers that helped students see what they needed to work on were identified as adding to the fairness of grading as opposed to lack of fairness in some grading of "mechanical errors."

When the actual group was interviewed at one time, they identified several ways grades or grading were unfair to them. Some fell into the category of the mechanics of grading, such as a lost assignment that is not the student's fault, and it has to be redone, timed assignments for

which the teacher takes off for what is not finished, and an assignment that is made without explanation and its result is poor.

Concern was also expressed for the unfairness of grading all subject areas the same, especially in the area of "art"-type subjects as opposed to "unartistic" subjects. This comparison was dependent with these students on the degree of "set answers" in the subject area. Discussion was full and open when the students expressed their ideas on a graduation test and its unfairness to have to take the test to graduate when they had made good grades all year.

"Do you think you should get a grade only on what you 'turn in'?"
Students were asked to give their ideas regarding the work that they turned in to the teacher. The pilot group did not have a lot to say about this question; some viewed it as a matter of behavior or attitude about their work. The actual full group had no comments. However, the actual group individual interviews revealed a number of thoughts.

Only one response to this question was positive. This student's opinion was that "Whatever you do, if the teacher looks at it as you go it will help you." A different student stated that this type of situation was a good opportunity to do better and get a better grade than if the teacher did not look at the work as it was being done.

One reason for negative reaction to this question was a student's experience that if what was turned in was "bad," and the whole class did a "bad" job, then the teacher usually would not "count" the assignment. A positive aspect of this particular situation was stated to be that the students would learn from doing it; they would find out what the right answers were. Another student said that some work is done for "understanding," and the second time it is done for correcting mistakes.

Time was a factor for one student, who stated that if the assignment were "late" as opposed to being turned in on time, there should be a penalty for lateness, but the work should still be graded. Another opinion was that if a paper is graded, the student is upset if it is not recorded in the grade book. In the same line of thought was the statement, "If you don't turn it in, maybe you shouldn't do it."

Several students interpreted the question as thinking that the teacher should grade ". . . all of it . . . you're supposed to do all the teacher assigns." Many also felt that no matter what the assignment--study sheets, poems, oral work, puzzles, notes, funsheets, class discussion, quizzes, class work, etc.--all should be graded. A student or two qualified their statements to state that if it pertained to the subject area it should be graded, and that the variety was to keep them from getting "tired" of the work rather than to keep from grading it.

Many of the students also said that how they acted, took care of books, followed directions, etc. were as important for grading consideration as were papers turned in to be graded. An interesting statement in answer to this particular question came in the form of a student who thoughtfully replied, "Judging and grading are two different things."

"Do you think you should help decide how you are graded?" "Do you think you should grade yourself?" The pilot group felt it was important for students to know if they had done the best they could. They also felt it was good for each individual to do his or her best, to push toward self goals without putting too much pressure on themselves and without feeling guilty if goals were not reached. They warned against giving themselves a false sense of security by pressuring themselves. This group also felt that a good self-evaluation was the ability to learn

what they had talked about in class--by asking themselves the question, "Have I done my best?"

Several students in this group, as well as in the second and third phase of the research, identified this question with the actual mechanical marking or correcting of school work. For example, one student stated: "I like to grade it myself so if I made a bad grade no one will know." Extra explanation by the interviewer brought more thought into the type of responses already given and to follow.

The individual interviews brought negative reaction in two main areas. One was that grading was the teacher's job and up to the teacher and principal to "take care of." The second area for negative thoughts on this question centered around students trusting themselves (which they might not want to do), always giving themselves a high grade, and saying, "I'd probably just say mine's the best."

One of the positive responses to this question was: "That's hard." Some of the students felt this type of grading should be a type of self-evaluation in the areas of keeping check on oneself to see if he or she is ". . . sticking to the hypothesis," taking the option of doing an assignment over, deciding for oneself what grade is desired, and deciding how he or she thinks they have done. The areas of poetry writing, book reports, and how they think were mentioned for this type of evaluation.

One student said it would be a good idea to grade oneself, but had no ideas about how to accomplish it, while another thought he should write down a grade and turn it in to the teacher because he knew how much time he had put into the assignment. One interviewee said: "I like to take a guess as to what I'm going to make." The idea of evaluating oneself and keeping it to self was in direct opposition to the student who

said he would talk to the teacher and give her his opinion about how he thought he had done.

While one student said he would mechanically double check himself on whether or not his work made sense and had complete sentences, another smiled and said, in answer to this question: "Yes, I'd give myself a 90 on my project for the science fair." When asked this question as an entire group, the actual interviewees summed up their answer to this question by stating that there were those among them who knew and would admit there were times they could do better work than they do.

"Do you think you and your classmates should grade each other?" Following this question, the interviewer asked if the students thought there would ever be a time when it would be a good idea for them to grade each other. The pilot group expressed a generally negative attitude for this type of grading. Their ideas fell mainly under the heading of personal feelings about peers that would affect the grading. They felt it would lead to saying things about one another, invading another's privacy, and guilty feelings for both the grader and the student being graded. The group did react positively to the idea that this type of grading would require common trust over a period of time and when done on "project-type" assignments.

The actual individual interviews brought some contrasting views to those of the pilot group. One student said: ". . . classmates know if you've done good or if you've done bad," while another stated, "Kids know more about other kids than the teachers do because kids don't tell the teacher." When this question was asked of one student, he said: "Some might get a fair grade and some might not. At least they tried." These responses supported some of the positive aspects the students gave in response to grading each other. Several thought that assignments such as

art projects, story writing (proofreading, finding mistakes), and book reports (finding out how a classmate liked the book) were good assignments for grading each other. Two students even said it would be good practice and opportunity if a student planned to be a teacher.

The majority of those who were positive about grading each other said it would help them learn from others, would let them know what others thought, and how they could improve. One student said that a classmate could explain to him how he "messed up," while another said that not using names would be helpful in this situation.

Several of the individual interviewees did agree with the pilot group when they said grading each other was not a good idea--that it should be done by someone who "knows something about it." These students overwhelmingly felt that the main problem was one of personal likes and dislikes and popularity entering into the evaluation--a situation of grading people instead of work. Two of these students felt that this usually did not happen with teacher evaluation of work. As one of them put it: "They're [teachers] usually pretty fair about it."

"How would you make the way you are graded better?" The pilot group did not come to an agreement on some points of this question, such as whether or not to keep the "low grade limit" for which parents had to be notified, and whether or not it was helpful for parents to talk to teachers about existing problems. Some felt this relationship could help parents understand their child better. As one student stated: ". . . sometimes there can be a home problem like drugs or something, and its better for the teacher and the parents to discuss it, and sometimes its not."

A few students felt grading would be better for them if the teacher did not "take off" for such things as leaving the date and heading off a

paper, not being able to read the assignment (the teacher needs to help them learn to write better), and having to rewrite spelling words.

Several in this group agreed that grading would be better for them if it included how they acted with others, that this would help them have the goal to be nice to others. They made it clear, however, that this did not include grading on friendships; they should choose their own friends with no pressure.

In the individual interviews, one of the students replied: "That's a hard question," and another said, "That's a toughy, too." A student suggested a lower grading scale, while another thought less points should be "taken off" when papers were graded. A student felt there should be more parent interest in paper work, because kids worry about grades as far as parents are concerned. This also led her to say that there should be more than two parent-teacher conferences a year so that the parents would know what the kids are "really doing." The suggestion was made that a word description of progress be made rather than a number of letter grade. Another suggestion for making grading better was that kids should not be compared, because they are different and have different abilities. One boy stated that grading would be better for him if all subjects continued to be taught, and another said grading would be better if attitudes at recess were graded.

The most common answers from the individual interviews were in two areas: one was what students could do themselves that would make grading better. These students felt that they could try harder and take more time--they sometimes needed more time. A second area of concern was the opportunity to do extra point work if it were needed or wanted by the student and to be able to do work over, or have another chance at their assignments.

When the actual group discussed this question en masse, their suggestions were to have no comparisons made with them and their siblings and to use poorer papers as tools to help them learn what they did wrong.

"What would you add to the way you are graded?" "What would you leave out of the way you are graded?" The pilot group discussion of this question centered mainly around the type of grading they were experiencing in a music class. They were required to have a paper and pencil test on instruments of the orchestra. They were also graded on how well they sang and sat up straight. One or two of the students felt this was unfair if they did not have the ability to sing well, and that these types of subjects (music) should be graded differently than a subject like math. They would have left off this type of grading for this particular class, but one student summed up this area of the discussion with: "We should have a lot of variety [in different subjects and ways graded]." Another concern for this group was that one low grade in a subject could cause them to be missing from the honor roll.

When individuals were interviewed with this question, some of them voiced different things they would leave off or add to grading. Several mentioned being given another chance, getting extra points on "real hard questions," and doing extra work to bring up low grades as things they would add to the grading system. One student suggested adding more subject areas, and another said being graded on how messy his desk was should be left off when it came to being graded. Another suggested more careful listening as well as different teacher explanations as they would apply to knowledge about the students' needs. A sixth grader felt that report cards should be left off, papers saved, and parents should come to school to get reports on how the students were doing.

The actual group interview was probably the most lively and lengthy for this question than any other. They did decide they would leave off less than they would add. This group, for the most part, would leave off the "conduct and citizenship" sections of the report card. One student supported his suggestion by saying: "If you tear up books, you should pay for them instead of getting a grade for it." Another student countered: "If you act right in class, you won't have to worry about a conduct grade--you bring a conduct grade on yourself--if the shoe fits, wear it."

An alternative concerning the conduct grade was to make notes at the top of individual papers instead of the report card to give a reason for poor performance, such as: ". . . too much talking, etc." Also mentioned in this area was a statement that parents pay more attention to daily work for reports rather than waiting and relying heavily on the report card. The contributor of this idea said that it would make students feel more confident. A suggestion was also made that parent-teacher conferences be held every month, or that teachers talk to parents on the telephone once a month.

More experiments and activity-type learning, as well as more "fun things" were suggested, and both brought laughter and agreement from the entire group. One student said that giving an "extra 100" for whole class efforts would be a good thing to add to grading. These students also felt that more math and science should be added because, "You need it for about every job except maybe bagging groceries." More physical education was also a popular idea, since "We have to keep our heart exercised to live longer."

According to this group, efforts should be closely examined and taken into account if students are doing their best. They thought it

should be kept in mind that students are just (now) learning and it may be different or harder than what they (teachers? parents?) learned.

"What part should effort and attitude have to do with the way you are graded?" This question asked the students if they thought they should be graded on their attitudes toward school work. The pilot interview revealed that this should be the case. An early reaction to the question was that attitudes should be a part of grading because a student felt that how he or she acted now would have a bearing on how he acted, ". . . because the way you act with others is sort of how you will act when you get out in the world."

One student suggested that students who had problems and tried hard should be given extra points for this type of positive attitude. These boys and girls felt they should try "extra hard," even if they have already worked hard and still want a higher grade.

When given a description of a hypothetical situation in which a student's "average" for a grading period might be only a point or two away from a "B" but still in the "C" range, the students were asked to decide if a good attitude on the part of the student would warrant the teacher's recording the higher grade for the grading period. Several students almost argued over this, but most of them agreed on a selection of points:

1. If the teacher knew he was really working, he would ask to do something for extra points.

2. Another boy said he would ask for extra point work, so "my Dad wouldn't be disappointed in me," and then go home and work harder.

3. A girl said she would probably keep the lower grade, knowing she had done her best and it was what she truly earned. She would also work harder to raise her grade in the next grading period, and she could

"watch TV." Closely related to this answer was one that declared: "You can if you think you can," and that one could feel good about him or herself if they were close to their goal.

Part of the consensus of the group included the idea that they should work harder for better grades if they had the capabilities. They also spoke about the fact that a good grade may not be the same for everybody by saying: "A good grade is the best each person can do." This group also felt that if jealousy arose because a classmate had done better in grades than another, and the capabilities were present for the jealous person, then it was up to that person to do better rather than to feel jealous.

When asked this question, one of the individuals interviewed stated: "Your attitude has to be good--otherwise, the teachers won't like you that much." Another student went so far as to say that it was fair to take away from a grade if attitude was bad. Also added were that it was important to have a good attitude to fill in for extra points and affected grades to the point of promotion.

Several students stated that attitude should be a part of the grade if a good attitude was present, with an effort given to accomplish what the student thinks he can accomplish. One student described this situation with: "[You have to get] up and at 'em--doing it right off." Others said that if attitude is one of hard work and willingness, it should affect the number grade in subject areas or on the report card. Warning was made here that caution should be used because a student that appears to be paying no attention might be "saving it up." One student said: "It [attitude] goes with it--if you work real hard and have a good attitude, you sometimes don't do well." More than one of these individuals stated that a grade for attitude should be recorded ". . . at the

bottom of the report card [with] conduct and stuff." His feeling also included the idea that it would probably show up in the number grade or average anyway, if he were paying attention, listening, and working.

The actual group interviewed as a whole did not have much to add or change to this question from their individual interviews. This question was summed up with the idea that attitude should be graded according to abilities and how hard the student is working.

"What ideas do you have for grading that are completely different from what you have known to be used before?" Students in all three phases of the research were asked to give their thoughts about alternatives to report cards, even to the extent of eliminating them. The pilot group discussion was lively on this issue. One student replied that: "It depends on what you do instead." Another felt the form of the report card should be changed to a sheet of paper because there would be more room to write on it. An additional suggestion was that it was better to see one set of grades at a time, rather than in accumulated form. This idea was countered by stating that it was still better to see all the grades together to see if the student had improved or failed. A student added that it was better to keep the report card so that it could be seen how the student was doing rather than hearing it from the teacher. There was a comment that one does not know if the parent really listens, but one can tell if they really look at it and say: "I think it's better."

Several students felt the report card used in connection with parent-teacher conferences was a good idea. It was suggested that these be held once a month with the sheet of paper listing the student's misbehaviors, grades, and a place for the parent to sign. Also mentioned was the fact that teachers can tell parents extra "stuff" that cannot be put on a report card, and that some parents prefer something written down for

the students to take home. "Then, like, if you're going to try to hide it or something, they know that you've done it and they'll gripe you out." The conference was also found to have advantages if parents simply sign the report cards and do not look carefully at them. In this situation, the ". . . face-to-face conference is better." One student said, "It's better for both [report card and conference] to coincide for the students to know better how they're doing." It was also noted that taking a report card home without explanation was harder on the students because of parent reactions. Some also felt it was easier for the teacher to talk to students following the parent-teacher conferences, and that it was better for the students to see report cards after parents had picked them up. These students also felt that they received more help from their parents after talking to the teacher. One student commented about reporting to parents if there was a "bad" grade: "The parent needs to ask the teacher what their [student's] problem is before they say all the mean things to him." These students spoke very responsively to the idea (introduced by the interviewer) of student conferences in which the teacher gave four or five minutes to let the student know how they are doing and how they can work better.

Answers were somewhat different on this question for the individual interviews. One student suggested no alternatives and said: "If the answer's in the book, I put it down." He did, however, say he should get a grade on how well he thought questions out.

Another suggestion was to keep all grades consistent, either numbers or letters, and for a grade like "S" one had to know what it meant and that numbers were more specific. One boy said that there should be no grades on how tall you sit or how well you sing, and that you should not be forced to take classes like music and gym if you do not like them. In

addition, a student mentioned the idea that courses should be "like in college," so one would know what to do. A concern of one student was that student achievement tests should not be compared--only with individual students and not from year-to-year.

A suggestion was made that teachers should make learning more fun. "Most of the time we sit in our chairs and listen to the teacher--it's hard to soak up that way." Another comment was that students should talk about their grades more with their teachers. One student boldly stated that there should be no grade books and grades should reflect what a person feels. He thought that if you got your answer a "good way," then it was ". . . okay, even if it's not the 'right' answer."

The entire actual group did not change or add much to this question. They did suggest making only one report card (set of grades), and that, hopefully, they would be the grades (high enough) the student was aiming for. They also suggested not having a grade for a grade (such as a number or letter), but on how hard the students worked.

"Is it better to have an 'average' grade or only a 'final' grade, if the final grade is very good? Why?" This question was presented to the students when they were beginning a new unit of study in social studies or science. After a little reading and some information from the teacher, they had a quiz and did not do very well. However, they kept studying, did some experiments and research, got more information from the teacher, did some assignments, and worked hard to learn about the unit. They steadily improved and made a perfect or near perfect score on the final test for the unit. The students were then asked if they felt (since they had worked and studied hard) their final grade should be that of the final test, or if they should receive an average grade of all their work combined for the unit.

The pilot group and the actual group did not have a lot of interest in the question, but felt mostly that they should receive an "average" of all the grades combined. The individual interviewees overwhelmingly had the same opinion, but had more comment on their thoughts. Several students said that if they did all the work, they should have all the grades, especially since they had tried their hardest and that their efforts should count. The majority of these students said that the average would be more fair for several reasons. One student said they would know more, so they should have the grade on everything, while another said that it would give them a chance to "bring up" the grade as they progressed. Another said the average would give a better idea of how he was doing--the latter choice (final test grade "A" for final grade) might give a sense of being a "straight A" student and he might not do as well later. It was also felt by one student that he would not have to work as hard if the last grade were the only one that counted.

The only countering response to those already mentioned, except for one who said it might be okay if you did it all the time and that it would be different for different people, was that he would take the grade at the end because the improvement (from beginning to end) ". . . shows you studied a lot."

"Do you have anything else to add?" At the conclusion of all interview sessions, the students seemed pleased to have had the opportunity to express themselves, and seemed to have enjoyed the interviewing process. The pilot group and the actual group were more comfortable in giving answers, even though they might not have agreed with all that their peers said. The individual interviewees seemed more nervous with the interview process itself (some felt relieved when they were finished), but most of them did relax and give thoughtful, in-depth answers to the questions of the interviewer.

CHAPTER V

INTERPRETATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Interviewing children in this study allowed the researcher to examine grading and evaluation in schools from children's viewpoints. The researcher agreed with Barth (1980, p. 130), who stated that he found ". . . insufficient weight is given to children and the messages they convey," and that schools are becoming more and more adult-centered because principals, parents, offices, and committees have placed demands on teachers, so much so that they (teachers) have little time or reason to read children's messages. With this lack of knowing about children's messages, Barth also found that children are deprived of "representation" in instructional decisions, and teachers are deprived of data that could make a classroom experience more relevant, valuable, and, as often stated in schools, meaningful. "Formal evaluation, represented by marking or grading a student, is among the most salient experiences of school life" (Engleberg and Evans, 1986, p. 91). It has been characterized as, ". . . the basic currency of our educational system" (Deutch, 1979, p. 393). Grading students has also been found to be a major problem area in schools (Engleberg and Evans, 1986). Even though there is importance and emphasis placed on grades, little research has been done on student attitudes and understandings of grading; researchers have opted instead to focus on teacher attitudes and viewpoints on grading (Engleberg and Evans, 1986), and on how students perceived teacher attitudes toward grades (Engleberg and Evans, 1986).

School work itself has been characterized as the ". . . exchange of performance for grades" (Doyle, 1983, p. 181). Engelberg and Evans (1986) also cited several studies which collectively showed a considerable amount of student agreement that ". . . getting good grades is the most important thing about school" (p. 45).

Because of the information and support of others such as those already mentioned, the implications, interpretations, and recommendations, and conclusions in this chapter were based on the views and attitudes of children, theories gathered from a variety of educators and psychologists, and the personal and professional observations of the researcher during 17 years of experience as an educator.

Interpretations

During this study, children were asked many questions, but in all three phases of the study there emerged three common themes in the children's descriptions, thoughts, and perceptions about grading and evaluation. These themes were:

1. Grades, specifically good grades, are important for getting to the next level of public schooling, college, and obtaining scholarships.
2. Whether or not grades are fair or unfair.
3. Alternatives (or adjustments/changes) to present grading systems.

The themes came directly from the children's interviews as they were dictated on tape and transcribed by the interviewer/researcher. It was felt by the researcher that these themes emerged because of the experiences that students have had with grading and evaluation in a school situation for six or seven years, how these experiences are perceived by the children and how they become reality to them. As Bogdan and Biklen

(1982, p. 35) explained: ". . . there is interaction between culture (how we interpret our experiences) and the meanings people attribute to events." Combs (1972) prepared us for this interpretation of what happens in classrooms, including grading as a function of the perception of students and teachers. Combs stated that adequate understanding of the dynamics in classrooms must be through both the teacher's purpose and how the child perceives what is happening.

These researchers who study a culture of this nature have as their goal the meanings that cultural participants take for granted and to depict the new understanding for the reader and for outsiders (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982). This researcher shares such a goal.

Importance of Making Good Grades

Little time listening was required before it became apparent that students' first thoughts about grading included wanting to make good grades. Evidence of a strong desire in this area was varied by concerns ranging from individual papers and assignments, to knowing how much effort would be required to do well on assignments and tests, to feeling that their grades, even at this point in their school careers, would affect their getting into college and being successful and having scholarships to help with this venture. Some even perceived good grades as important for getting good jobs.

Several students, even though thinking about good grades, worried about making low grades, failing, and being nervous about grades. Added to these perceptions were the beliefs that honor rolls, rewards (such as money and privileges), and punishments (such as grounding and revocation of privileges) were factors affecting their performances as seen through grades. These perceptions can become problems if educational systems

revolve around reward and failure as received through grades. Students who need encouragement the most and need to be involved to the highest degree are the very ones who experience failure through grades (Kirschenbaum, Simon, and Napier, 1971).

Also interpreted by this researcher were the pressures felt by students to do well on grades and the fact that grades were perceived to be a motivation for learning, proof of material learned, and reason to try harder to do better. In a study by Burton (1983) on the effect of letter grades in the curriculum, support was given to the pressure, motivation, and resulting self-concepts characteristics of grading. Elementary teachers were split on whether or not grades pressured students. Over half did not think they were a negative factor in motivation, but many could not decide if they increased the students' enjoyment of the learning process. Nearly half of these teachers did feel that the letter grade system had a negative effect on how students feel about themselves (self-concept) (Burton, 1983). Student reaction in this study revealed that the most important thing they were doing was obtaining enough points for a grade, which made them focus more on finishing work than on what they were learning.

Fairness of Grades

Careful listening and transcriptions of interviews revealed a perception and belief about whether or not grades are fair or unfair. These interpretations were revealed through various individually and collectively expressed reasons for these ideas in many different situations.

The students in this study felt that grades were most unfair for students who had learning difficulties or were "held back" a grade because of poor grades or evaluations, especially if they were criticized

by other students. The opposite side of this coin was also examined in students stating that they did not feel it was fair to be placed in a "special class" if they "messed up" just one time. Different working speeds, make-up work, testing without being given proper background, and grading of thought questions (no specific right or wrong answers) in an unfair way were also expressed as reasons why grading was sometimes unfair.

Unfairness was a term also tempered at this time with very mature thought from these boys and girls as they expressed an awareness that fairness of grading depended on knowing rules and procedures for several types of situations and variations in grading procedures from one teacher to another. These ideas are interpreted by this researcher to be an expression of the frustrations students sometimes feel with grades, as well as with those feelings about themselves and others because of grading practices.

In a previously mentioned study by Burton (1983), elementary students were interviewed about whether or not they thought grades were fair. Those who did not think grades were fair agreed with those in this study that teachers differ in their expectations and ways to grade. This study also expressed children's concerns that evaluation or judgment is emphasized over learning and that effort and attitudes are not considered (Burton, 1983).

The students interviewed for this study felt it was important to talk to teachers about the grading system and their own personal grades on specific assignments as a way to make grading more fair. The students also revealed some ways they thought grading was fair, especially from those students who worked hard, tried their best, and made good grades. Fairness was felt to be present if problems were the students' fault, and

where clear cut right or wrong answers were a part of the assignment. These students also felt that the teachers were usually fair about grading. The Burton (1983) study agreed with some of this study's students, as they felt that grades were fair in that they were informative, important, let them know how they were doing, and were either a reward or justifiable punishment for whether or not the job(s) were completed and correct.

For this study, fairness or lack of fairness in grades depended largely on the kind of grades students made and how they viewed these grades in accordance with their own abilities and the specific situations of the classroom.

Alternatives

A third outstanding area of reaction and student emphasis in this study was found to be in the area of alternatives to present grading procedures or routines. The students' suggestions were original, straightforward, and to-the-point ideas, the nature of which required little interpretation by the researcher.

Most of the alternatives suggested were not changes of any vast nature, but adaptations and new considerations for commonly held grading practices. Making use of what "kids know about kids" was a highly repeated suggestion, along with allowing poor work to be used as a tool for learning rather than recording as a grade. Also helpful was the many times repeated plea to give students a second chance and opportunity for extra work and/or points after they learned more about "what they were doing" and had a chance to evaluate themselves on their performances. Along with this same kind of thinking were great desires for variety in both assignments and grading and for more school work to be fun. They

expressed the need for continual emphasis in math, science, and physical education, and having choices about what courses are "taken."

There was a "split decision" as to whether or not "conduct and citizenship" sections of the report card should continue to be used, but many expressed the thought that there should be an account taken of responsible attitudes toward school work. Most felt the report card itself should remain in use, but perhaps in a different form, to allow more room for written teacher comments.

Parent-teacher and student-teacher conferences were interpreted to be popular with students, mostly in connection with the report card or actual work of the students. These students felt more confidence in, help with, and understanding about school work after such conferences and and a three-way direction (circular) of students, teachers, and parents. They also felt that students should not be compared except to themselves. As mature, responsible, and thoughtful participants in this research, the students expressed a great need for consistency on the part of evaluations/evaluators and taking individual responsibility to work hard.

Recommendations

This researcher's recommendations begin with that of more research in the area of school grading and evaluation for the purpose of finding more information that will positively affect this area of schooling. Specifically, this research should gain input and add insight into this area from individual teachers at the local school site to eventually include greater areas of school systems. Glasser (1969), creator of reality therapy, stated that individuals must ask themselves: "What can I do that is better than what I am doing now?" and "Ask questions as you

look inside classrooms." Of utmost importance is reception of input from teachers, and especially students in all levels of the school.

Listening to students through classroom discussions, peer interactions, and informal interviews like that of the nature used in this study, will give pertinent, relevant, and valuable insight into what students perceive, believe, and have to offer toward the necessary improvement and change that should come about for the betterment of schools for the sake of their students.

Secondly, the researcher recommends the use of grades as a reemphasized evaluative tool rather than as a means of being rewarded and punished for student achievement or the lack of it. "The need to get grades discourages far more students than it stimulates" (Marshall, 1968, p. 44). Included in this area would be an emphasis on the importance of learning itself over levels attained through grades as learning occurs. Some critics of grading do not advocate the elimination of evaluation of the student's progress. Their aim is to change the grading system to a system of better communication, more meaningful evaluation, and more learning (Kirschenbaum, Simon, and Napier, 1971). Perhaps the most important aims for twentieth and twenty-first century life should include the need for students to acquire: (1) respect for knowledge, (2) skills for acquiring and assessing needed information, and (3) abilities to identify problems that need to be solved (Good and Brophy, 1973).

The third recommendation is that classroom teachers study and use a wide variety of grading methods with input from students as to whether or not these methods would be termed as fair or unfair. This would require time on the teacher's and student's parts, but would, in the estimation of this researcher, provide positive feedback for grading. Both students and teachers should keep in mind the types of activities or assignments

being evaluated, their reasons for being completed, and how best to evaluate them. Backing this recommendation is that we start with an inspection of information about students considered in grading, what information we need and how much, how to get it, and what to do with it when we get it (Marshall, 1968). "The atmosphere within the school would also change considerably if, instead of competing, students were encouraged to share and help one another in the learning process" (Kirschenbaum, Simon, and Napier, 1971, p. 63).

As a final recommendation, the researcher would encourage educators of all types and all levels of the educational system, and especially those in individual classrooms, to (initially) try the first three recommendations from this study. Following that, it is suggested that educators be open to students, research, and their own convictions as they work for and try out alternatives to present grading routines and practices. Teachers so compelled will find materials and suggestions from professional (such as Burton, 1983; Simon and Bellanca, 1986) and parental views and can "weigh" those with what they know about and hear from students. A willingness to learn, adapt, or alter, or even truly change a situation is the basic premise of this recommendation.

Conclusions

There are two major conclusions from this study. The first was that literature and affective psychology offer an abundance of support and information for researching and studying the students' view of school matters, specifically in this study, that of grading and evaluation procedures. The perceptions of the students in this study, as interpreted by this researcher, pointed to the valuable and usable information that

can be obtained from within our schools, giving educational insight and understanding for making decisions and changes.

In the final analysis, the practice of conducting conversations with participants is in itself a form of action which helps forge a reformed practice. By engaging in conversation, researchers are helping to create spaces within educational institutions for thoughtful reflection oriented towards improving practice (Carson, 1986, p. 84).

Secondly, this type of qualitative research, with an interview approach interwoven with the support from literature and information gained through the interviews, enhances the ability and willingness of those closest to the educational situation at hand to study, react, and act for appropriate changes or improvements. "Any information will have an effect upon the behavior of an individual only to the degree that he or she has discovered the personal meaning of that information for himself or herself" (Simon and Bellanca, 1976, p. 6).

The effects and side effects on students must be the first consideration in whatever we do in classrooms, just as the effects and side effects of new drugs must be considered by those in the medical profession. For education, the effects and side effects cannot be ignored, even if they are inconvenient to the learning process (Simon and Bellanca, 1976).

Instead of declaring that "we can't," "we won't," "we don't understand how," or "they won't let us," education professionals can work through this type of research to foster understanding and change for the betterment of learning in classrooms.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adler, M. (1983). The Paideia Problems and Possibilities. New York: Macmillan.
- Barnes, S. (1986). A study of classroom pupil evaluation: The missing link in teacher education. Journal of Teacher Education, 36, 46-49.
- Barth, R. S. (1980). Run, School, Run. Boston: Harvard University Press.
- Bogdan, R. C. and Biklen, S. K. (1982). Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Brandt, R. (1988). Introduction: What should schools teach? In: Content of the Curriculum, ASCD Yearbook. Alexandria, Virginia: ASCD.
- Brandt, R. (1990). On restructuring schools: An interview with Al Shanker. Educational Leadership, 47, 11-16.
- Brandt, R. (1985). The search for solutions. Educational Leadership, 44, 3.
- Brandt, R. (1986). Time to reform schools. Educational Leadership, 43, 3.
- Brown, R. (March 10, 1984). Quick fixes won't work--A place called school. Oklahoma Observer, 10-11.
- Burton, F. (April 11-15, 1983). A study of the letter grade system and its effect on the curriculum. (Report #EA 016238.) (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Education Research Association, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.)
- Carson, T. R. (1986). Closing the gap between research and practice: Conversation as a mode of doing research. Phenomenology and Pedagogy, 4, 73-85.
- Cassidy, J. (1977). Reporting pupil progress in reading. The Reading Teacher, 31, 294-296.
- Cawelti, G. (1990). Increased federal dollars should not go to NAEP. ASCD Update, 32, 2.

- CBS News Television Program. (September 6, 1990). America's toughest assignment: Solving the education crisis.
- Combs, A. (1982). A Personal Approach to Teaching. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Combs, A. (1972). Educational Accountability: Beyond Behavioral Objectives. Washington, D.C. ASCD.
- Combs, A. (1979). Myths in Education. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Combs, A., Avilla, D., and Purkey, W. (1978). Helping Relationships: Basic Concepts for the Helping Professions. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Costa, A. (1989). Re-assessing assessment. Educational Leadership, 46, 2.
- Dewey, J. (1916). Democracy and Education. New York: Macmillan.
- Dewey, J. (1902). The Educational Situation. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Dewey, J. (1899). School and Society. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Deutsch, M. (1979). Education and distributive justice. American Psychologist, 34, 391-401.
- Dobson, R. and Dobson, J. (1981). The Language of Schooling. Washington, D.C.: University Press of America.
- Doyle, W. (1983). Academic work. Review of Educational Research, 53, 159-199.
- Eisner, E. (1988). The ecology of school improvement. Educational Leadership, 45, 24-29.
- Eisner, E. (1985). The Educational Imagination. New York: Macmillan.
- Engelberg, R. A. and Evans, E. D. (1986). Perceptions about school grading practice among educationally gifted, learning disabled, and normal elementary school pupils. Journal of Special Education, 20, 91-101.
- Evans, E. D. and Engleberg, R. A. (1988). Student perceptions of school grading. Journal of Research and Development in Education, 21, 45-54.
- Gage, N. L. (1977). The Scientific Basis of the Art of Teaching. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Glasser, W. (April 22, 1988). Reality therapy-control therapy. (Speech presented at Institute in Reality Therapy meeting, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.)

- Glasser, W. (1969). Schools Without Failure. New York: Harper and Row.
- Good, T. L. and Brophy, J. E. (1973). Looking in Classrooms. New York: Harper and Row.
- Goodlad, J. (1984). A Place Called School. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Goodlad, J. (1974). Looking Behind the Classroom Door. Worthington, Ohio: Charles A. Jones.
- Gullickson, A. R. (1985). Student evaluation techniques and their relationship to grade and curriculum. Journal of Educational Research, 79, 96-100.
- Jackson, P. (1968). Life in Classrooms. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- Kelley, E. C. and Rasey, M. I. (1952). Education and the Nature of Man. New York: Harper.
- Kirschenbaum, H., Simon, S. B., and Napier, R. W. (1971). Wad-ja-get? The Grading Game in American Education. New York: Hart.
- Marshall, M. S. (1968). Teaching Without Grades. Corvallis, Oregon: Oregon State University Press.
- Mayes, C. D. (1987). The practical paradigm: Children's perceptions of school. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Oklahoma State University.)
- Meisler, S. (August 25, 1990). Debunking standardized testing. Oklahoma Observer, 22(15), 9.
- Montagu, A. (1950). On Being Human. New York: Hawthorn Books.
- O'Neill, J. (1990). Piecing together the restructuring puzzles. Educational Leadership, 47, 4-10.
- Raebeck, B. S. (1990). Transformation of a middle school. Educational Leadership, 47, 18-21.
- Raffini, J. P. (1986). Student apathy: A motivational dilemma. Educational Leadership, 44, 53-55.
- Rathis, J., Healy, M., and Della-Planka, C. (1985). Grading problem: A matter of communication. Journal of Educational Research, 80, 133-137.
- Rayder, N. F. (March 27-31, 1978). The public outcry for humane evaluation and isomorphic validity. (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Toronto, Canada.)

- Rief, L. (1990). Finding the value in evaluation: Self-assessment in a middle school classroom. Educational Leadership, 47, 24-29.
- Rogers, C. (August/September, 1971). Instructor, 81, 65-66.
- Schryer, C. F. (March 19-21, 1987). Evaluation as dialogical praxis. (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Atlanta, Georgia.)
- Shepherd, G. D. and Ragan, W. B. (1982). Modern Elementary Curriculum. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Simon, S. B. and Bellanca, J. A., Eds. (1976). Degrading the Grading Myths: A Primer of Alternatives to Grades and Marks. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Sizer, T. (1985). Horace's Compromise. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.
- Snygg, D. and Combs, A. W. (1949). Individual Behavior. New York: Harper.
- Stiggins, R. J. (1985). Improving assessment where it means the most: In the classroom. Educational Leadership, 43, 69-74.
- Update. (January, 1990). Winning 'race' not a valid goal. Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), 32(4), 3.
- Wigginton, E. (1990). On twenty-five years of foxfire: A conversation with Eliot Wigginton. Educational Leadership, 47, 30-35.
- Yarborough, B. H. and Johnson, R. A. (1980). Research that questions the traditional elementary school marking system. Phi Delta Kappan, 61, 527.

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What comes to your mind when you hear the word "grades?"
2. Do you think you should have to be graded on your school work? If not, why should you be required to do your school work?
3. How do you think grades are fair? Unfair?
4. How would you make the way you are graded better?
5. What would you add to the way you are graded?
6. What would you leave out of the way you are graded?
7. What ideas do you have for grading that are completely different from what you have known to be used before?
8. Do you think you should get a grade only on what you "turn in?"
9. What part should effort and attitude have to do with the way you are graded?
10. Is it better to have an "average" grade or only a "final" grade, if the final grade is very good? Why?
11. Do you think you should help decide how you are graded?
12. Do you think you should grade yourself?
13. Do you think you and your classmates should grade each other?
14. Do you have anything else to add?

APPENDIX B

EXCERPTS FROM INTERVIEWS

Interview Excerpts for Pilot Group Interview

Interviewer: What would you do to make grading better for you? Would you change it in some way? Would you make it completely different, or just add to it? How would you make grading--your getting grades--better for yourself?

Response: I do think that if you make below 69 that's when your parents should know that you are flunking.

Response: Well, I would add to where you think and see how much they've [students] tried--how much they've improved, and if they have been away, you give them a second chance, and you really look into how much they've tried to do their assignments . . . so then you give them a little bit of prestige or a little ability to do it, and then if they make a bad grade, then they've really, really tried.

Response: I think the grade for notifying parents should be the same because your parents should know what you're making and I think its good that they should have to sign.

Response: Well, I think on notifying parents when you have a 69 or below to have your parents sign, but sometimes you may have tried your hardest but still flunked it, and your parents say, "Well, I'm not going to sign it." Anyway, so that means in three days you get punished, and I don't think that's right when you've tried your hardest and your parents refuse to sign.

Interviewer: Do you think that when the parents don't want to do this, in this kind of case, if they talk to the teacher, does that help? Does that make a difference in what happens?

Response: (Entire group: some agreement and some disagreement.)

Interviewer: "Yes" for some and "no" for others?

Response: (Much discussion all at once.)

Interviewer: Is it [parent reaction] because they think their child could do better?

Response: They think their child could do better and its funny because he has done better before. Like, say, I got three 100's, and the next day I got three failing grades. My mom knows I can do better because I did it the day before, and she signs it, but she says, "I know you can do better because look at the grades you've made in the past week or so. . . ." She knows I can do better.

Response: Well, I sorta think "yes" and "no." Sometimes a parent like _____'s mom comes up to the school and they're not going to sign the failing papers. Then the mom and the teacher really discuss it. Sometimes a mom really understands about her child without any trouble,

like sometimes there can be home problems or drugs, and its better for the teacher and the parent to discuss it, and sometimes it's not.

Response: That's why I think the parent-teacher conference comes in handy. Then the parent and the teacher have a chance to discuss the child's grades and punishments.

Interview Excerpts from Actual Individual Interview

Interviewer: What comes to your mind when you hear the word "grades?"

Interviewee: Well, like, sometimes I get scared about my grades. I just get scared because I'm afraid I'm going to make low grades. I get nervous when I get my report card at the end of the school year.

Interviewer: What do you think makes you nervous?

Interviewee: Well, sometimes its my grades and sometimes I get scared because I'm not very sharp about my grades and how I've been doing, but I haven't been doing a lot better lately.

Interviewer: Why do you think you haven't been doing as well lately?

Interviewee: Because its a new school and I get scared sometimes at new schools because its the first one I've ever been to that's new to me. I went to _____ school all my life, and the teacher kind of scares me.

Interviewer: Do you think you should have to be graded on your school work?

Interviewee: Un-huh. (No.)

Interviewer: Okay--why not?

Interviewee: Oh, because if I make bad grades, I usually get into trouble, and I don't like getting into trouble. It just makes me more nervous.

Interviewer: If you didn't do your school work for grades, then what could you do it for--what would be the reason to do it?

Interviewee: To see how much you know; to see how much you don't know; what you know and what you don't know; what your best subject is.

Interviewer: What could you do then, if you knew what you now and what you don't know, and what your best subject is?

Interviewee: I could work on what I didn't nknow that much about.

Interviewer: Are grades always fair? How do you feel about the fairness of grades?

Interviewee: Well, sometimes I don't feel like they're very fair.

Interviewer: Okay, in what way? Tell me about that.

Interviewee: Because if I make bad grades, I get into trouble, and then my mom would make me stay back a year and I don't want to stay back a year, 'cause people'd make fun of me and all that stuff.

Interviewer: Can you think of a time when grades are fair?

Interviewee: When I make good grades!

Sample Responses From a Question in the
Actual Group Interview

Interviewer: Can you discuss further what you might leave off or add to the way you are graded?

Response: Give an "extra 100" for effort as a whole class.

Response: Leave off the "conduct and citizenship" sections of report cards. If you tear up books, you should pay for them instead of getting a grade for it.

Response: If you act right in class, you don't have to worry about a conduct grade. You bring conduct grades on yourself--if the shoe fits, wear it. (Laughter from group.)

Response: Conduct grades are like letting your parents know how you act in class. It would be better to make notes at the top of papers instead of noting on the report card the reason for poor performance. (Example: "Too much talking," etc.)

Response: You could use the telephone to talk to parents every month or so.

Response: Parent-teacher conferences could be at the end of each month.

Response: You could ask parents to pay attention daily to papers for reports rather than waiting and relying heavily on the report card for how a student is doing. This would make students more confident if you look carefully at the report card and then look real carefully at daily work.

Response: I think you should look real hard at the conduct and effort section and take into account if you're doing the best you can. You should take into account that you may be just learning something and it's different or harder than what they [parents? teachers?] learned.

Response: I think we should do more experiments and activity-type learning.

Response: Do more fun things! (Much laughter, agreement, and talking all at once from the group.)

Response: More math and science are needed--you need it for about every job, except maybe bagging groceries.

Response. There is a need for P.E. to keep our hearts exercised so that we will live longer.

Z
VITA

Karen R. Travis

Candidate for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Thesis: ELEMENTARY STUDENT PERCEPTIONS AND BELIEFS ABOUT COMMON SCHOOL PRACTICES IN GRADING AND EVALUATION

Major Field: Curriculum and Instruction

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Altus, Oklahoma, December 19, 1947, the daughter of Floyd E., Jr. and Billie N. Albright Johnson. Married to Robert W. Travis on February 7, 1970.

Education: Graduated from Gould High School, Gould, Oklahoma, in May, 1966; received Bachelor of Science degree in Education from Southwestern State College, in January, 1970; received Master of Education degree from Southwestern State College in July, 1976; completed requirements for the Doctor of Education degree at Oklahoma State University in May, 1991.

Professional Experience: Classroom Teacher, 1970-72, 76-86; Elementary Assistant Principal/Teacher, 1986-87; Elementary Teaching Principal, 1987 to present; Adjunct Instructor, Southwestern Oklahoma State University, Fall, 1989 and 1990 and at present.

Professional and Academic Memberships: National and Oklahoma Associations for Elementary Principals, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Cooperative Council of Oklahoma School Administrators.