

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL: IS  
OUTCOME-BASED EDUCATION THE ANSWER?

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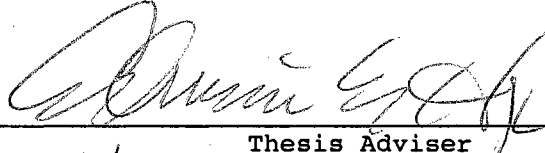
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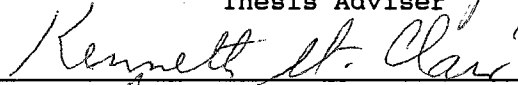
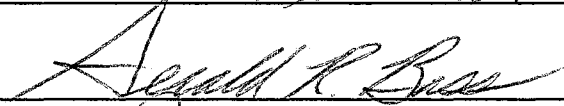
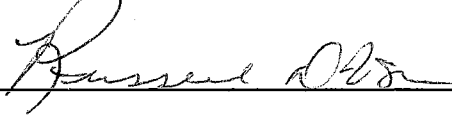
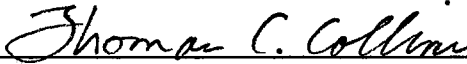
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## CHAPTER I

### DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Throughout the history of the United States, public education has been examined and criticized in various ways, such as the widely publicized "A Nation at Risk" report. Its message can be summarized in the following passage:

We report to the American people that while we can take justifiable pride in what our schools and colleges have historically accomplished and contributed to the United States and the well-being of its people, the education foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur--others are matching and surpassing our education attainments. If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre education performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves. (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 5)

Kearns and Doyle (1989) have also argued that public education in this country is in crisis with their report of startling statistics. They report that America's public schools graduate 700,000 functionally illiterate students every year, and 700,000 more drop out. Four out of five young adults in a recent survey could not summarize the main point of a newspaper article, read a bus schedule, or figure their change from a restaurant bill.

Upon examination of the current state of education, Bowsher (1989) has concluded that two major issues afflict the education process: the cost of education and the quality of education. The cost of education has risen faster than the rate of inflation, with most proposed solutions for improving education requiring huge sums of money, while the quality of education has declined at a time when people need to know more in order to take their place in the workforce.

Bowsher (1989) contended that, if these two problems are not addressed, the country faces some very serious consequences. Crime will continue to increase along with the costs of maintaining the legal and penal systems. A growing number of people will be unable to qualify for productive jobs. This will increase the cost of welfare programs, and many employees will not have the knowledge or skills necessary to contribute (or support) the United States' economic competition with other countries.

Historically, suggestions for school improvement have come from outsiders, like political officials, in the form of changes which reflect their personal beliefs (Sirotnik & Oakes, 1981). These views may not be appropriate in all schools because they lack a true understanding of the particular situation which is unique in every school. Rather than accepting mandated actions which would probably be incompatible with the views of educators, students, and parents of a school, Heckman, Oakes, and Sirotnik (1983) emphasized that if educators actually want to improve education, they need to look inside the school itself to find solutions to the existing problems.

Examining the unique culture of an individual school provides the correct perspective to identify problems, gain understanding, and determine possible ways to address them.

When asking the question about nationally proposed school reform--"Is it good for kids?"--Benton (1992) reported that very little attention has been paid to the individual needs of children. Instead, economic development, national security, and political power struggles have seemingly been driving the reform movement. He stressed that any reforms should consider the unique needs of each child first and those of society second.

Traditionally, the study of schools and the process of schooling has been conducted using a very simplistic model, viewing uneducated children as inputs and learned citizens as outputs. Sirotnik and Oakes (1981) have maintained that "anyone intimately familiar with school knows that the schooling process defies analogy with the factory model" (p. 165). This approach has failed to reflect upon the realities that schools hold for their participants by neglecting to raise basic questions about prevailing perceptions and ignoring situational problems.

#### Statement of the Problem

In response to the crisis in education as evidenced by the reported failure of traditional methods of education to prepare students for the changing demands of the workplace, outcome-based education (OBE) has become one of the new standards in American education and has been mandated by many state governments (Lauffer,

1991). In part, this mandate has been supported by state department officials and politicians because OBE is perceived to link achievement with outcomes for student success, thereby enhancing accountability. It purports to put emphasis on the learning end of the teaching-learning process with students being required to demonstrate mastery of specific outcomes. Nationally, in part, because of legislative mandates, many school district leaders have been faced with the challenge of determining how this model can be implemented in their schools. To accomplish the process of developing outcomes, literature on OBE has promoted the involvement of teachers, administrators, and parents, but has not mentioned the inclusion of students (Briggs, 1988; Spady, 1989b; King & Evans, 1991; Spady & Marshall, 1991).

Rogers (1984) claimed that some problems in education exist because students' perceptions of what school is about have continued to be ignored. He stressed that "finding out what is really going on in the minds of children as they go through the process of schooling is unquestionably one of our most difficult and neglected tasks" (p. 5).

For each school district, the initial focus in the implementation of OBE has been the determination of exit outcomes as the criteria for student graduation. To provide the most inclusive and effective results, students should be an integral part of this process. However, it has not been a common OBE practice to involve students in the determination of outcomes. But, if students are not considered when designing outcomes, what are the chances of the

outcomes truly being appropriate and/or beneficial?

Given these conflicting realities, a number of questions emerge: What relationship exists between OBE-designed school district exit outcomes and the perceived needs of students in those districts? Do students support the same sets of exit outcomes as do their educators? What rationales do students provide for their outcomes? What changes do students suggest to improve learning and school experiences?

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine students' perceptions of what schools have done and should be doing to prepare them for the future. The study was also designed to examine students' perceptions of their school district's proposed exit outcomes. The final purpose of the study was to develop a grounded theory based on the findings of these examinations.

#### Research Questions

Three sets of questions were developed to address the research purpose. The questions for the first part of the research were related to students' perceptions about their education:

- \* How do students believe their school experiences have helped them prepare for future challenges?
- \* In what areas do students feel least and most prepared?
- \* What do students think they should have learned, but did not?

- \* What experiences do students feel have been beneficial?  
What have been of little worth? and
- \* What do students perceive could be done to make school more  
"meaningful"?

The questions for the second part of the study were specifically related to an examination of students' opinions about the exit outcomes developed by the school district. Students were asked to describe their beliefs about the following outcomes and their possible inclusion as a goal of education:

- \* Methods for establishing and maintaining relationships with family, with friends, and within society;
- \* Ways to participate in the democratic process to make positive changes which affect everyone;
- \* Techniques for using leadership skills and working in a group;
- \* Ways to preserve and improve the environment;
- \* Methods for gathering and using information to set goals and adapt to change; and
- \* Ways to maintain a high quality emphasis in pursuit of all achievements.

The questions for the final part of the study were designed to synthesize students' perceptions and, from this synthesis, develop a grounded theory of student outcomes:

- \* What categories can be developed through the process of coding the data?

- \* How can subcategories be used to put the data back together in new ways?
- \* How can these new connections be used to form a grounded theory for student outcomes?

### Procedures

Qualitative methods can give the intricate details of phenomena that are difficult to convey with quantitative methods. The specific type of qualitative research used in this study was the grounded theory approach, which provided the theoretical framework to derive inductively informed interpretations based on data from the study. This theoretical formulation can be used to explain reality and represents a systematic way of building, synthesizing, and integrating knowledge (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The researcher's task should be to gather data and present them in written form by weaving descriptions, speakers' words, fieldnote quotations, and their own interpretations into a rich and believable narrative (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The grounded theory approach has employed systematic techniques and procedures which have led to the development of a substantive theory that meets the criteria for doing "good" science: "significance, theory-observation compatibility, generalizability, reproducibility, precision, rigor, and verification. While the procedures were designed to give the analytic process precision and rigor, creativity was also an important element" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 31).

### Research Criteria

The goal of this research was to uncover the nature of students' school experiences related to learning and provide new perspectives to guide practice. The process of developing a well-constructed grounded theory was guided by the following criteria for judging the applicability of theory to a phenomenon:

1. The theory should fit the substantive area if it has been carefully induced from diverse data and it is faithful to the everyday reality of that area.
2. Because the theory represents that reality, it should be understood by practitioners and the persons who were studied.
3. The theory should be general enough to make it applicable to a variety of related contexts if the data upon which it is based are comprehensive and the interpretations conceptual and broad.
4. The theory should provide control with regard to action toward the phenomenon, because the hypotheses proposing relationships among concepts are systematically derived from actual data related to that (and only that) phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

### Data Needs

Data about students' opinions of their educational experiences and how those experiences could be made more meaningful were required by the research questions. Documentation of the process used for generating the school district's proposed exit outcomes and



students' perceptions related to the value of these outcomes were also needed.

#### Population/Sample

This study was limited to one school district in order to be able to look deeply into this district as opposed to looking across many districts. The school district was located in a suburb of a large metropolitan midwestern city.

It was comprised of approximately 19,000 kindergarten through twelfth grade students. There were 18 elementary schools consisting of kindergarten through sixth grade, four junior highs for the seventh through ninth grade, and three high schools for grades 10 through 12. The socio-economic level of the students varied across the district, ranging from schools having 10 percent of the student body participating in the free and reduced lunch program to those having up to 70 percent of their students on free and reduced lunch.

To locate potential participants, letters were sent to parents of high school students in this district. This group was eventually narrowed to a heterogeneous representation of students who voluntarily participated in the study. The goal was to reach a data saturation point (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), which occurred after nine students had been interviewed. This determination was made when the same types of responses were being repeated and a lack of new information emerged.

### Data Collection

Because of its inductive nature and possibilities to best capture the kind of information being sought, the primary method for gathering data was the semi-structured interview. Interviews had the advantage of allowing for free response and potential for greater depth (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure the rights of the participating human subjects, approval from the Oklahoma State University's Institutional Research Board (Appendix A) was obtained. In addition to interviews, relevant documents were collected to provide a history of the development of the proposed exit outcomes by the school district in the study.

The Interviews. Open-ended, personal interviews were conducted instead of a written survey, or other methods, so students could create their own responses without being forced into prepared choices. Parental permission to be interviewed by the researcher was obtained from all of the subjects. The Consent Form For Research Participation has been included as Appendix B.

Students were individually interviewed to determine their perceptions of what they had learned throughout their school career. Specifically, students were asked to expand upon the areas in which they felt well prepared for the future and areas in which they felt they should have been better prepared.

The Interview Protocol. An initial list of questions was developed based on the concepts derived from the researcher's experiences and the review of literature; however, that only

provided a beginning focus since these concepts did not have previously proven theoretical relevance to the evolving theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The first section of the protocol centered on demographic information, the second section on general questions related to educational experiences, and the third section on specific questions about the school district's proposed exit outcomes. Additional questions were asked as necessary throughout the interviews to clarify responses and gain more information for the purpose of achieving density and variation of concepts necessary for developing a grounded theory. The Interview Protocol has been included as Appendix C.

Documents. Various documents were gathered to show the development of the school district's process for identifying the proposed exit outcomes. This collection included memos, OBE inservice handouts and notes, agendas of OBE Task Force meetings, the district's new mission statement, rough drafts of the exit outcomes, school board meeting minutes related to the proposed exit outcomes, and a final draft of the exit outcomes. The revised list of exit outcomes is included as Appendix D.

#### Analysis and Interpretation

The process of analysis began with an examination of related research and basic concepts of outcome-based education, considering both positive aspects and potential problems. The results of the review of literature and analysis of the school district's outcomes were used to develop interview questions. Interviews with students

were tape recorded so they could be transcribed in full at a later time. Each set of responses was analyzed before conducting the next interview. To develop a grounded theory from research data, analysis was composed of three major types of coding: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

Concepts were considered to be the conceptual labels placed on discrete instances of phenomena and served as the basic building blocks of theory. Open coding was the analytical process by which concepts were identified and developed in terms of their properties and dimensions. The basic analytic procedures included the asking of questions about data and the making of comparisons for similarities and differences between each incident, event, and other instances of phenomena. Similar occurrences were labeled and grouped to form categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Axial coding was the set of procedures whereby data were put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories. This process involved several steps which included inductive and deductive thinking. This was carried out by utilizing a coding paradigm comprised of conditions, contexts, action/interactional strategies, and consequences (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Selective coding was the process used to select one core category as the central focus, systematically relate it to other categories, validate those relationships, and fill in categories that needed further refinement and development. This was the final step toward making the leap between creating a list of concepts and

producing a theory. Integration of categories was accomplished in a manner similar to that of axial coding, but it was done at a higher and more abstract conceptual level (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

#### Principal Researcher

When conducting a study, researchers come to the situation with varying degrees of expertise.

Theoretical sensitivity refers to the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn't. . . . It is theoretical sensitivity that allows one to develop a theory that is grounded, conceptually dense, and well integrated--and to do this more quickly than if this sensitivity were lacking. (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 42)

My background includes 12 years in the field of education, all of them in the public school district under study. I have taught various grades at the elementary level, served one year as the arts coordinator for the district, and am currently the assistant principal at one of the elementary schools.

The field of education has been, and continues to be, extremely challenging and rewarding for me. Having also been a student enrolled in some type of classes for most of my life, I can identify with both the successes and frustrations encountered by children during their classroom experiences. As an educator, I have always attempted to seek out the best possible ways to bring about maximum learning in students within a positive and creative atmosphere.

During the past four years, I have participated in more than 150 hours of instruction related to outcome-based education. In addition, I have been involved in the process of developing the

proposed exit outcomes, process outcomes, and instructional units for the school district in which the students who were interviewed were enrolled. While I believe there are many positive aspects related to outcome-based education, and I have been very involved in its development for my school district, I do not consider it to be absolutely the "answer" which will change the field of education making future improvements unnecessary. I think educators must thoroughly analyze the various innovations being proposed by the "experts" and determine to what degree they will be incorporated into their own system of beliefs and practices.

In order to make positive changes in any field, I believe input should be sought from all possible sources. In education, it is the students' opinions which are frequently overlooked. I have attempted to take the knowledge and research I have gathered related to OBE and objectively assess how the students' perceptions fit with what the OBE experts, educators, parents, and state officials have proposed to change in the field of education.

#### Basic Assumptions

Conventional wisdom leads to the foundational assumption that teachers want their students to learn and to be successful in the future as a result of the students' experiences with the teacher (Good, 1981). Teachers know that students have the potential to learn alone and in conjunction with others (Glasser, 1986), and research has shown that past learning experiences have an effect on a person's future learning (Block, 1971), students learn in

different ways and at different rates (Block, 1971; Guskey & Gates, 1986), and what happens in the classroom directly affects student success (Mayer, 1985).

Six basic assumptions provide the foundation for this study:

1. If the ultimate goal of education is to improve learning, then it is necessary to consider students and their interactions in the educational processes of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.
2. Teachers, administrators, parents, students, and other community members are interested in and concerned about improving the processes of education.
3. Maintaining respect for students is an important factor in the educational process.
4. Students should benefit from their daily experiences at school and the processes of learning.
5. Motivation to learn will be greater if students have input into the process.
6. Students welcome the opportunity to express their opinions freely in a nonthreatening atmosphere, especially when the topic is closely related to themselves.

#### Significance of the Study

Outcome-based education has provided a framework for teachers to examine their own educational philosophy and can offer practical ways to put their beliefs into practice in the classroom (Spady, 1988). Further development of curriculum has been necessary to

identify what students need in order to be successful in the future, and literature supports the inclusion of students in this process, especially since they would be the ones who will be affected by the changes (Jackson, 1968; Weinstein, 1982; Heckman, Oakes & Sirotnik, 1983; Schempp, 1983; Goodlad, 1984; Rogers, 1984; Lindahl, 1991). The findings of this study should provide some clarification of this phenomenon, thereby impacting future research, theory, and practice.

### Research

Research problems have frequently arisen out of professional experiences which have been judged to be less than effective, efficient, human, or equitable (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). When a great deal of time and effort is put forth in an attempt to bring about desired improvements, it is hoped that the results will be positive. However, if a key component was missing, the chances of realizing benefits from the hard work may be slim. In this study, the missing piece was considered to be input from students into a school district's process of developing exit outcomes.

Even though an increase in the amount of research on students' perceptions of school has taken place in recent years, rarely have the results been utilized to help educators plan improvements. Therefore, using children's perceptions to interpret school culture has a substantial effect yet to be realized on classrooms and schools. Previous recommendations for further research have included systematically mapping the student perception domain, charting developmental milestones, and studying contextual and



methodological variables (Weinstein, 1982). This study should provide insight in some of these areas.

The findings of this study should also add to the body of research related to students' perceptions of school experiences and learning. Specifically, this study was designed to develop a grounded theory based on students' perceptions which can be used to expand and clarify processes associated with OBE. It has helped to evaluate the possible merits of OBE as one avenue through which positive reform can be successfully achieved based on the perceptions of students. In addition, the findings can be used by educators in the school district under study to make more informed decisions related to the development of exit outcomes and the implementation of outcome-based education.

### Practice

The findings of this study could be of use to teachers, administrators, and other educators who would like to improve the school experiences for students. They would be especially important for those who are considering the merits of, or who are in the process of, implementing outcome-based education. By examining the voices of students, the information gained could lead to meaningful changes in direction and outcomes which might otherwise work against the students' perceived needs.

The findings could be especially significant for the educators, parents, and students in the school district under study. It hopefully has provided information gained from the students which

only exists as a result of this study. This information can be used by those involved in making important changes as the school district moves toward implementing outcome-based education.

### Theory

This study was based on the qualitative grounded theory approach in which I was not "constrained by having to adhere to a previously developed theory that may, or may not, apply to the area under investigation" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 49). "Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 23). The processes involved in this study have led to the development of a grounded theory which can be used not only to explain the data, but also to provide a framework for action. Questions asked and comparisons made have led to the discovery of new insights which may be related to other research and have useful applications.

### Reporting

This chapter has included an introduction to the study. Chapter II contains a review of literature which is directly and indirectly related to this study. General information about the following areas is reviewed and correlated with the components of outcome-based education: (1) educational issues, (2) development of outcome-based education, (3) value of student input, (4) curriculum, (5) instruction, and (6) assessment. Chapter III presents the data through open coding. Chapter IV presents the analysis and

interpretation of data through axial coding, selective coding, and the grounded theory model. Lastly, Chapter V presents the summary, discussion, implications, recommendations, and conclusions which evolved from this study.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

"What nutrition and reproduction are to physiological life, education is to social life" (Dewey, 1916, p. 11). Education has been the way a culture was transmitted and also the way in which it was transformed. In modern times, the growing complexity of knowledge and life causes society to look to the school for enabling the rising generation to gain the needed insight and power to build a better future (Tanner & Tanner, 1980).

In Chapter I, a rationale for seeking input from students on changes needed in schools was provided. Incorporating their suggestions into the process of implementing outcome-based education was also emphasized. This review of literature consisted of descriptions of the following areas, along with their relationship to various components of outcome-based education: (1) educational issues, (2) value of student input, (3) development of outcome-based education, (4) curriculum, (5) instruction, and (6) assessment.

#### Educational Issues

Many issues have continued to be discussed throughout history in the field of education. Different people have perceived a variety of problems which they consider in need of addressing. One of the key issues has always been how to determine the most effective method for learning how to learn. Directly relating this problem to

educational practices, the next issue has become developing the best method for making improvements to achieve maximum learning.

### Perceived Problems

According to a 1986 study conducted by the Business Roundtable, American businesses have been disappointed in the general quality of the preparation of high school graduates for entering the labor force (Bowsher, 1989). The main reason for this lack of confidence in the public schools was that currently most schools have not considered what skills their students will ultimately need to be successful in the workforce (Labor Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, 1991).

A recent study by the United States Department of Labor (1991) concluded that more than half of our young people leave school without the knowledge or foundation required to find and hold a good job. For most of this century, America did not have to worry about competition from abroad. At home, the technology of mass production emphasized discipline on the assembly line. More recently, the demands on business and workers have been viewed differently. Corporations must meet world class standards and so must workers (Labor Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, 1991).

Teachers and principals at all levels have cited providing for individual differences, getting students interested, maintaining classroom control, and the process of testing, grading, and promoting students among the top educational concerns (Morrow, 1986). The National Governors' Association (1989) has developed a

framework for school restructuring after seeking advice from many experts.

They have suggested that curriculum and instruction be modified to support higher-order thinking by all students. In addition, they stated that the use of instructional time needs to be more flexible, learning activities need to be more challenging and engaging, and student grouping practices should promote student interaction and cooperative efforts.

#### Learning How To Learn

In his first book about future trends, Naisbitt (1984) described society as having moved from an industrial age to an information age. He pointed out that "we are drowning in information and starved for knowledge" (p. 17). Less than ten years later, in his second future trends book, Naisbitt and Aburdene (1990) presented ten new structural megatrends, all related to the accelerating information of the 1990's. "Experts estimate that at the current rate of knowledge expansion, a student who graduates from college today and does not update his information will find that within 15 years, 90 percent of what he learned in school will have become obsolete" (McCarthy, 1991, p. 14).

Educational methods of the past have left most people ill-prepared to meet the challenges of the information explosion. "Schools can no longer function as filling stations to which young people drive up, receive the knowledge they need for a working lifetime, and then drive away. Students must be taught to think and

to solve problems" (Fiske, 1991, p. 35). Educators need to move beyond an emphasis on facts and teach students skills necessary for success in life, which includes self-discipline, time management, ability to prioritize tasks, and a lifelong love of learning (McCarthy, 1991).

### Educational Practices

Stevens and Anderson (1987) conducted a study which examined how teachers' practices influenced students' perceptions of control in social and academic domains and identified the specific teacher practices which were related to student perceptions of control. Practices that appeared to result in a more favorable classroom environment included respect for and sensitivity to individual need and growth, predictability and teachers' structuring of information about the environment, and opportunities for students to practice self-regulation.

In her qualitative study of dropouts, Fine (1991) has concluded that "irrespective of how we measure, calculate, and define, those who begin school least advantaged, those who have the fewest resources to compensate, and those who will face the most discrimination after school are the ones who are themselves most likely to leave high school with neither degree nor diploma" (p. 232). She also emphasized that "punishing these students with retention, automatic failure, suspension, or the absence of retrieval programs has severe and adverse consequences, particularly for young women and particularly for those reading and computing at

or above grade level" (Fine, 1991, p. 246).

Willower and Lawrence (1979) found that the amount of control teachers place on students depends upon their perceptions of student threat to teacher status. The social and organizational characteristics of public schools have fostered teachers' perceptions of students as threats to their status as a teacher and place a premium on pupil control. This finding can be translated into the first step toward teachers feeling comfortable with student input. They must reduce their perceptions of students as a threat to their status as a teacher in order to allow opportunities for students to have a voice in what goes on in the classroom.

#### Improvement From Within

From his extensive research into the current state of schooling in this country, Goodlad (1984) concluded that our entire public education system was near collapse. He emphasized schools must do the educating not consciously done elsewhere in society, but that they are not likely to go beyond teaching facts and fundamental skills unless we request it. He saw some individual schools getting better and stressed that improvement essentially has to be accomplished on a school-by-school basis instead of being forced onto the school from an outside source.

Whitehead's (1929) early work supported this concept of diminishing the importance of a core curriculum common to all schools by stating that "a common external examination system is fatal to education. The process of exhibiting the application of



knowledge must, for its success, essentially depend on the character of the pupils and the genius of the teacher" (p. 21). Sirotnik (1987) echoed these ideas by stressing that:

school improvement must take place in schools by and for the people in them; description, judgement, decision-making, and action taken regarding improvement efforts require informed inquiry and critical thinking; this evaluative process includes multiple perspectives on what constitutes appropriate knowledge and information; and this process is not a one-shot deal but an ongoing part of the daily worklife of professions involved in their own school improvement efforts (p. 41).

Using Glasser's (1986) Control Theory, Lindahl (1991) has suggested that to improve schools, administrators need to seek input from teachers who should then seek input from students. Other experts agree that this concept of empowerment--of teachers through shared decision making, and students by giving them a more active role in their own learning--represents one of the keys to determining what changes need to be made to improve schools (Fiske, 1991; Maeroff, 1988). Their rationale is that those closest to the situation are in the best position to make the most informed decisions and need to be given the necessary authority to carry out this responsibility.

Developing new models of curriculum and assessment requires new assumptions about teaching, learning, and measuring educational progress. Diez and Moon (1992) have suggested four questions which can be used to guide this change process:

1. What do we want students to know and be able to do?
2. What will count as acceptable performance?
3. How can we assure expert judgments?

#### 4. How can we provide feedback?

The believe that by answering questions educators can connect teaching, learning, and assessment in a meaningful way. "With explicit goals and standards, teachers' expert judgement becomes a vehicle for informing learners about their progress toward specific goals and guiding them toward improvement" (p. 41).

#### Summary

Due to the rapidly increasing amount of knowledge, youth of today must develop the skills necessary to become a lifelong learner; yet, current educational practices are focusing on how to control the students instead of teaching students how to think and solve problems. To improve education, proposed reform can best be accomplished on a school-by-school basis rather than being mandated from outside sources. The process for improvement should be ongoing and include the empowerment of teachers and students. Combining multiple perspectives with shared decision making, which includes input from the students, should lead to the development of more effective models of curriculum and assessment.

#### Value of Student Input

Starting from a description of what life is like inside classrooms, Jackson (1968) has supported the idea that those on the receiving end of instructional strategies deserve to have their ideas heard by those who are providing these practices. Educators need to involve students in the instructional planning process for

the primary purpose of discovering what will be most beneficial to them.

#### Need For Student Input

Barth (1980) found that insufficient credibility and importance have been given to children and their messages because schools have become increasingly more adult-centered. Many demands have been placed on teachers by principals, parents, and the central office, leaving them little time to pay attention to their students' feelings and opinions. This has created a situation where children have been deprived of "representation" in educational decisions, and teachers have missed out on important information which could make instruction more meaningful.

Based on his belief that development occurs as a result of individuals' interaction with their environment, Mergendoller (1982) examined the effect of school size, student role, and social organization of the classroom on adolescent development. The research suggested that the typical secondary school has a deleterious effect on adolescent development. Findings showed that schools are too big, students are often excluded from active roles in governance, and classrooms are often too competitive. It was concluded that secondary schools provide powerful levers to facilitate as well as to impede the adolescent development process.

#### Students' Perceptions

Weinstein (1982) examined various categories of student

perceptions of classroom environment and found that children are actively and continuously interpreting classroom events and drawing inferences about what they observe happening. He concluded that students' views are sometimes inconsistent with adults' views, but they still constitute reality for the children, making it beneficial and necessary to gain insight into their conception of school and schooling. In a comparative study between teacher and pupil perceptions of eight facets of the learning environment in mathematics classes, Ben-Chaim (1990) also found that teachers' perceptions tended to differ from pupils' perceptions, although not always in the hypothesized direction.

In her study of students' perceptions of school, Mayes (1987) found that children want to be respected by their peers and teachers. She also reported that students view school as a place to socialize with their friends, while also recognizing the value of getting an education. Conclusions stressed that "firsthand knowledge of children's perceptions, descriptions, and interpretations of the internal life of school brings about a broader understanding of the school's actual state of affairs and increases the chances of making meaningful decisions and necessary changes" (p. 133).

Schempp (1983) studied the influence of decision-making on elementary school children's attitudes, motor skills, self-concept, and creativity. He concluded that allowing children to share in making classroom decisions had a more positive effect on them than being in a teacher-dominated classroom. Shepherd and

Ragan (1982) have argued that the most important part of curriculum planning occurs when teachers and students plan together for reasons such as those described in the review of studies done on this topic.

### Summary

Research has shown there is a need for student input so that meaningful changes in education can be made; therefore, if improvements are to yield the maximum benefit for students, educators should give serious consideration to students' perceptions. Teachers need to ask students to express their views because they are not necessarily the same as their own. Sharing in decision making also has a positive effect on students because action taken would probably make their learning opportunities more meaningful. Given this inclusionary view of students in their own educational process, what does outcome-based education propose and why?

### Development of Outcome-Based Education

Focusing on student outcomes is not new; the origins of outcome-based education can be traced back to the early 1950's, having evolved over the past several decades. To establish a true understanding of the OBE Model, it is necessary first to examine the history of how the philosophical basis has been transformed into its present state. This description has also provided the background from which potential problems could arise.

## History

Early development began with Tyler's (1949) belief that learning can take place without formal instruction, but it is impossible for teaching to take place in the absence of learning. He proposed that educators needed to determine what they wanted students to learn and what evidence would be accepted to verify they have learned it. His suggestion that well-written objectives be connected to purpose, content, organization, and evaluation, was later combined with an emphasis on Bloom's (1956) cognitive domain of higher level thinking skills. Mager's (1962) ideas on preparing instructional objectives were incorporated by stating the behavior to be performed, conditions for performance, and criterion to measure performance. Influence also came from Glaser's (1963) notion of criterion-referenced measurements which provided feedback to inform instruction and assist in evaluating courses of study.

An integral component of OBE has been the concept of mastery learning which was based on Carroll's (1963) supposition that all students can learn if they are provided the conditions that are appropriate for their own learning. This assumption meant routinely allowing different amounts of time for teaching and learning. It was later developed by Bloom (1968, 1984) and Block (1971) to enable the majority of students under group instruction attain levels of achievement that closely resemble those of good tutoring conditions. Their model was built upon a congruence among learning objectives, instructional practices, routine feedback, corrective/enrichment procedures, and evaluation process.

During the period between the 1960 and the mid-70's, other experts influenced the development of OBE. The affective domain was proposed as an important part of a student's educational progress (Krathwohl, Bloom & Masia, 1964) which contributed to the emphasis on what educators want students to "be like" as a result of their school experiences. Johnson (1967) made a distinction between curriculum and instruction creating a difference in the "outcomes" and methods by which they are achieved. Gagne's (1974) emphasis on writing observable goals played a part in the way outcomes should be "demonstrated."

Later development included the influences of competency-based education (Spady, 1977), which was built around the integration of outcome goals, instructional experiences, and assessment devices. In addition, the pressures from outside education for accountability have played a significant role throughout the formative process of OBE (King & Evans, 1991).

The concept of empowerment has provided the foundation for the outcome-based education model which promotes empowering students for future success. OBE has been used to restructure many educational programs, making major differences for significant numbers of students. In a study which compared Utah districts that implemented OBE to those which had not, it was stated that "teachers have attributed many improvements to OBE, including better student achievement and grades, higher student self-esteem, more students becoming self-directed learners, better student attitude toward school, and better study habits and less waste of time" (Applegate &

Evans, 1991, p. 61).

Other studies have shown similar positive results in different school districts around the country. Semester test scores were higher in OBE sections (Buffington, Curd & Lunt, 1988), SAT scores were higher in OBE groups (Walker, 1990), and the achievement level of all students was raised, with the "at-risk" students in OBE classes outperforming the "gifted" students in regular classes (Burns, 1987). "On a less formal level, we have reports from teachers who are using OBE that they are having great success with students who feel more successful, cooperate with each other, and think learning is fun" (Curiale, 1991, p. 9).

#### The OBE Model

According to Spady (1988), the overall philosophy of outcome-based education has developed from the paradigm that whether students learn something is more important than when they learn it. It has been based on the premises that all students can learn and succeed, success breeds success, and schools control the conditions of success. Transformational OBE has derived broad-scale outcomes of significance from assessments of future societal and environmental conditions that students will encounter. Then, educators must redesign curriculum, restructure delivery systems, and redefine credentialing and reporting systems to directly facilitate those outcomes (Spady & Marshall, 1991).

Using the OBE model, "organizing for results" has implied a deliberate attempt to plan and conduct essential activities to



accomplish educational aims successfully. OBE has offered solutions for the problem of how the calendar imposes fixed limits on student learning time and teacher instructional time. This means having all students learn well, not just the fastest, the brightest, or the most advantaged (Spady, 1989b).

Spady (1991) has claimed our educational systems, schools, and instructional programs have not been organized to ensure successful results, but instead, they have been organized primarily for student custody and administrative convenience. To organize for results through transformational OBE, organizational change in education must take place through the use of intended outcomes as a driving force in the restructuring of curriculum, instructional delivery, and student assessment and credentialing (Spady, 1991).

#### Potential Problems

When considering new ideas, there has automatically been a resistance to change because it represents something different from the past. "The OBE picture may not be easy for many educators because it is unlike the schools we have experienced. The traditional approach has us clearly picture success for some in the form of bell shaped curves" (Kaler, 1990, p. 28) which guarantees mediocrity for the majority and even failure for some also. As Spady and Marshall (1991) readily admit, moving toward OBE requires a significant paradigm shift (Barker, 1992) on everyone's part, but especially the classroom teacher who is ultimately responsible for carrying out the daily practices.

One temptation has been to turn any new idea into "the answer" which can easily be implemented by even the worst teachers and will work for all students. While OBE may not be the magical cure for education that we have all been looking for, it does present some very positive aspects which can be incorporated into what is currently being done in the schools. However, new methods or techniques attempted in classrooms frequently have not been accompanied by proper training. Adequate staff development and follow-up support are absolutely necessary to prepare educators to implement OBE with the flexibility it requires to be successful (Lauffer, 1991).

The manner in which outcome-based education is interpreted ultimately depends upon various philosophical viewpoints. A very "functionalist" (Burrell & Morgan, 1979) or structured person could turn OBE into a mechanistic process potentially creating a system which ignores the unique needs of individual students. Educators who operate from more of a "radical humanist" (Burrell & Morgan, 1979) viewpoint will probably see endless possibilities for multiple realities in each classroom. These philosophical differences may cause conflictual situations in schools.

### Summary

Building upon the foundation of empowerment, the OBE model uses the methods of mastery learning and focuses on what students need to learn for future success. With the goal of having all students learn well, the intended outcomes become the driving force for all

instructional decisions and practices. To have a positive effect on students, many of the traditional ways of thinking and doing things have to be abandoned, and a paradigm shift must occur on the part of most educators; therefore, adequate training is necessary to increase the chances of actually making a significant educational difference for the students. Successful implementation of OBE will require some changes in areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

### Curriculum

Educational institutions have continuously been engaged in curriculum decisions without giving corresponding attention to curriculum as a subject of thought. Changes in the nature of knowledge, the conceptions of the learner, and the demands of social life have called for a change in the conception and function of the curriculum (Tanner & Tanner, 1980).

Ragan and Shepherd (1971) have defined curriculum as "all the experiences of children for which the school accepts responsibility" (p. 3). Coming from the practical paradigm, Reid (1979) has regarded curriculum dilemmas as practical problems that should be solved by obtaining knowledge from within the actual curriculum setting itself. This inside picture provides the only vantage point which can lead to the effective and purposeful implementation of educational reform.

### Viewpoints on Curriculum

The precise definition of the concept of curriculum has been continuously debated during the past century. After analyzing the various transformations, Tanner and Tanner (1980) have come to regard curriculum as "that reconstruction of knowledge and experience, systematically developed under the auspices of the school (or university), to enable the learner to increase his or her control of knowledge and experience" (p. 38). Different viewpoints on the purpose of schools have included education as preparation for the workforce, education for social competence, education for equality, education for technological supremacy, or any combinations of these beliefs. Currently, preparation for the workforce is the one being given the most attention.

Preparation for the Workforce. After examining what takes place in different classrooms, Good and Brophy (1973) concluded that the most valuable skills students should acquire to be successful in the next century include: (1) respect for knowledge, (2) skills for acquiring and assessing needed information, and (3) abilities to identify problems that need to be solved. McDaniel (1992) has claimed that educational emphasis needs to move from testing and accountability to autonomy and nurturance. He has proposed that teachers confront the questions of how content can be used to facilitate student growth and cognitive development.

Employers have been seeking adaptability and the ability to learn and work in teams. Traditional jobs have changed and new jobs

have been created everyday. High paying but unskilled jobs have been disappearing. New workers must be responsible and creative problem solvers with skills and attitudes on which employers can build. Employers and employees share the belief that all workplaces must "work smarter" (U. S. Department of Labor, 1991). Glasser (1990) has claimed that educators must stop settling for minimal goals such as reducing dropouts and discipline problems and start convincing students to work hard because there is quality both in what they are asked to do and how they are asked to do it. Currently, few students work hard and almost none do what we or they would call quality schoolwork (Glasser, 1990).

Developmental Approach. Regardless of the particular viewpoint on curriculum, Kohlberg and Mayer (1972) have suggested that educational objectives be viewed from a developmental approach leading to mental structures and processes that are adaptive and adequate for coping with complexity. This outlook has seen growth in the cognitive structures which serve the processing of information. Learning has become the development and modification of mental schema through which the individual interprets and thinks about the world.

This developmental approach has led to one of Dewey's (1916) contributions to education in which he insisted that we stop trying to give "essential" knowledge to children. Instead, he suggested that we concentrate on the experiences the child needs to take the next developmental step at any particular time. Students have to experience the benefits of learning at the time of learning, not at

some remote and distant future.

### OBE Curriculum

The overall OBE philosophy represents a way of "doing business" in education which focuses on "exit outcomes of significance" as definers and shapers of the total curriculum. This means organizing all of the school's programs and instructional efforts around the clearly defined exit outcomes students need to demonstrate when they leave school. Developing outcomes should be a direct outgrowth from a serious assessment of challenges and opportunities students will face in the future. Educators need to consider what students should know, be like, and be able to do in order to be prepared for life after school (Spady, 1989b).

The OBE model has placed emphasis on learning rather than on completing assignments or making certain grades, which has been the case in many classrooms. In a time of drastic change, it is the learners who inherit the future and the learned who find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists (Hoffer, 1982). David Briggs (1988) has used this idea from Eric Hoffer to pinpoint how important it is for teachers to move away from "covering concepts" to teaching skills which develop the abilities of students to become life-long learners. As the principal of a high school in which OBE is being implemented, Briggs (1988) has claimed that in determining what the outcomes will be, four key questions must be answered by the members of a school faculty:

1. What do we believe about our students?
2. What do we know about the future?
3. What do we want for our students?
4. What do we do in our classrooms on a daily basis to accomplish this?

Once the outcomes have been determined, the curriculum and instructional design process should be conducted in a downward direction from the culminating demonstrations on which everything ultimately focuses. An emphasis on high expectations for all to succeed should be constantly maintained, regardless of when the outcomes are accomplished. Expanded opportunities and support for learning success should be provided so that students routinely have more than one chance to receive needed instruction and to demonstrate their learning successfully (Spady, 1991).

#### Summary

Various viewpoints exist regarding the purpose of school and what should be included in the curriculum. Continuous changes and advances in many areas related to education have necessitated transformations in curriculum development. The OBE model represents one way to address needed curriculum changes by focusing on student demonstrations of outcomes necessary for future success. Once the curriculum has been determined, it must then be translated into actual instructional practices.

## Instruction

Several studies have shown the importance of congruence between the beliefs and practices of a teacher. Mayer (1985) concluded that the nature of one's beliefs in relation to practice can have a positive or a negative effect on the quality of instruction. Teachers need to be given greater opportunities for understanding basic systems of philosophy and the relationships connecting these positions to decisions they make regarding classroom methods and procedures (Brown, 1969). Dobson and Dobson (1983) have emphasized that we should raise critical questions about why we do what we do, rather than constantly trying to find better ways of doing things we are already doing.

### Viewpoints on Instruction

Most experts have claimed a definite line cannot be drawn between curriculum and instruction (Tanner & Tanner, 1980). For the purposes of discussion related to this study, instruction can be described as teaching methods or delivery systems. If knowledge is understood to be both factual and procedural, then instruction represents ways in which knowledge is passed on to the students. Instruction can be thought of as the various methods used to bridge the gap between the students and the curriculum.

The major points of view on instruction have depended upon whether it is teacher-directed, student-centered, or a developmentally appropriate balance of both. The ways in which the instruction is presented have often been called the "hidden



curriculum" because schools teach a great deal implicitly through the kinds of rules they impose, and even through the social and physical settings they provide for learning. They have taught students to work alone competitively or to work cooperatively in groups, to be active or passive, and to be content with facts or to also seek insight (Goodlad, 1984).

Based on research into the dimensions of thinking and learning, Marzano (1992) has stressed that learning involves a complex system of interactive processes. Teachers must create situations where students can breed positive attitudes and perceptions about learning, acquire and integrate knowledge, extend and refine knowledge, use knowledge meaningfully, and develop productive habits of mind. To achieve this, educators must consider what we know about learning which "indicates that instruction focusing on large, interdisciplinary curricular themes is the most effective way to promote learning" (Marzano, 1992, p. ix).

Motivation has always been a major concern for teachers, but especially regarding low-achieving or "at-risk" students. Some students have persisted, working for their own intrinsic interest, while others work because they have been required to and do not believe their successes or failures are linked to any of their actions. Alderman (1990) has developed a model which helps these students link what they did to the outcome. This model uses a "mastery orientation" to emphasize learning and progress over performance and ability. Errors are viewed as a natural part of the learning process with opportunities to relearn concepts and correct

mistakes. Students know exactly what is expected and the specific criterion to be used for measuring success. This takes the focus off ability in comparison to other students as the reason for failure. By helping students to take responsibility for their learning, motivational equality can be promoted in the classroom.

### Lead Management and Cooperative

#### Learning

Important implications about instructional methods can be concluded from research on learning and have been incorporated into the foundation of lead management and cooperative learning. Leinhardt (1992) described three findings from the last ten years: (1) there are multiple forms of learning, (2) students must build on prior knowledge, and (3) learning is a social act. By using input from students, education can incorporate appropriate learning styles and prior knowledge into the instructional planning and strategies. The social nature of learning places attention on shared problems and tasks having many potential advantages.

When students talk to each other, they rehearse terminology, notational systems, and manner of reasoning in a particular domain, thus reducing the individual burden of complete mastery of material while keeping the vision of the entire task in view. By building upon the social nature of learning, we may be able to solve some of the problems of mechanistic and fragile knowledge that seem to have plagued the American educational system (p. 24).

Traditional coercive management in the schools has been suggested by Glasser (1990) as the root of the instructional ineffectiveness problem. He feels educators need to replace the

"bossing" that turns students and staff into adversaries with a system of management that brings them together. Glasser bases his claims on the control theory and states that teachers need to practice "lead-management" instead of "boss-management" with their students. Lead-managers spend most of their energy figuring out how to run the system so that workers will see that it is to their benefit to do quality work.

The lead-teacher spends time frequently asking for students' input on how more could be learned or what could be done to make the class more enjoyable. This idea of lead management is similar to Covey's (1989) description of the habits of highly effective people, in which he defines interdependence as "the paradigm of 'we'--'we' can do it; 'we' can cooperate; 'we' can combine our talents and abilities and create something greater together" (Covey, 1989, p. 51).

The concepts of lead management and interdependence have been used as the major premises of cooperative learning emphasizing the power of divergent thinking and learning. When teachers release some of the control over learning situations and share the responsibility with students, a dramatic release of creative potential can occur for both. Small group tasks can be designed at all levels of thinking in the taxonomy developed by Bloom (1956). The exposure to multiple perspectives inherent in group work especially fosters analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1990).

Utilizing cooperative learning can contribute to a teacher's use of the basic learning principles of motivation, practice, retention, transfer, learning styles, and extending students' divergent thinking. Cooperative groups have provided opportunities for intrinsic motivation, social motives, mutual respect, and active participation. These groups can also allow for a wide variety of learning styles and modalities (Davidson & O'Leary, 1990).

#### OBE Instruction

The methods of instruction employed in the OBE model should be designed to be student-centered and highly interactive, use cooperative learning strategies, and incorporate an integrated curriculum. When considering how Seels and Glasgow (1990) compared the components of traditional methods to the process of systematic instruction, the OBE model closely resembles their description of systematic instruction. This can be summarized as a process which considers the needs of the individual students, rather than focusing on the teacher behaviors, in each of the 17 areas which were compared.

In a review of 46 outcome-based mastery learning studies, Guskey and Pigott (1988) determined that almost all the findings showed "positive effects as a result of the application of group-based mastery learning strategies" (p. 202). A study of mastery learning and cooperative learning showed that the combination was extremely effective for increasing achievement, especially with brighter students (Mevarech, 1985). In a synthesis of research on

OBE, it was found that the concepts of mastery learning and cooperative learning have been "carried forward and incorporated into outcome-based education" (Lauffer, 1991, p. 22).

### Summary

Educators should examine why they employ certain practices in order to create a positive learning environment for the students. Providing a balance of developmentally appropriate instructional methods means increasing the amount of student-centered activities in many classrooms. Teachers must give up some of their control and encourage interdependence among students and themselves, which can be accomplished through the instructional practices associated with lead management and cooperative learning. OBE instruction is comprised of strategies associated with the cooperative learning approach combined with the components of mastery learning. To achieve maximum learning, a common set of significant outcomes must be linked to effective instruction and assessment because good assessment is an integral part of good instruction (Herman, Aschbacher & Winters, 1992).

### Assessment

Good teachers have constantly assessed how their students were doing, gathered evidence of problems and progress, and adjusted their instructional plans accordingly. The key to good assessment has been matching the assessment task to intended student outcomes-- the knowledge, skills, and dispositions identified in initial

assessment planning. Good assessment provides information which can be used to characterize students' functioning and performance accurately and to make sound decisions that will improve education (Herman, Aschbacher & Winters, 1992).

#### Viewpoints on Assessment

Considering what is needed in the way of school improvement, Eisner (1988) has suggested that our evaluation practices play a large role in determining what we stress in the process of education. He believes that a balanced curriculum and improved teaching cannot be achieved if evaluation methods are inconsistent with our educational goals. There are a variety of methods used to measure learning, but the overall difference in views on assessment depends upon whether the emphasis is placed on simple recall of low-level information, or on students' actual use of knowledge and complex thinking skills (Travis, 1991).

Looking at current assessment practices, Costa (1989) has suggested ways in which educators can improve their methods. We need to expand the range and variety of assessment to include a more complete and accurate picture of student progress than that allowed by standardized tests. Part of this process includes reeducating legislators, parents, board members, and the community to help them understand how achievement tests represent an inadequate measure of the quality of students, teachers, and schools.

In a synthesis of research on assessment, Herman (1992) takes this concept one step further by concluding that standardized tests

actually have a negative impact on program quality. She discovered a number of researchers who had found that accountability pressures encourage teachers and administrators to focus planning and instructional effort on test content, leading to more and more time being devoted to preparing students to do well on the tests.

According to study conducted by the U. S. Department of Labor (1991), the most effective way of teaching and assessing skills has been in the context of the real environment instead of insisting that students first learn in the abstract what they will then be expected to apply. This will cause students from the most gifted all the way to those experiencing the greatest difficulties, to be more attentive, more interested, and more teachable, because they will find the coursework more challenging and applicable. Instead of the traditional testing methods, real life application can be most effectively evaluated using authentic assessments. Examples would include direct observation of students' behavior, assessing products of students' long-term projects, or having tests which ask students to explore literature, write thoughtful and readable prose, and do laboratory or primary-source research (Wiggins, 1989).

Glasser (1990) has maintained that educators need to teach students the important lesson that the success or failure of our lives is greatly dependent on our willingness to judge the quality of what we do and then to improve it if we find it lacking. A quality school should not accept low-quality work from a student. They need to work to get the right answers, but more importantly the students need to know what they did to get them right. The emphasis

should always be on how to do a skill and where it may be applied in their lives, not merely on completing assignments and memorizing facts.

Several studies have shown that the ultimate purpose of assessment should be to enable students to evaluate themselves (Costa, 1989; Travis, 1991). Portfolios have been used as a successful tool to promote this self-evaluation process. Rief (1990) has described portfolios as a type of evaluation that matters to the students, because students play an important part in determining what is selected. This increases students' motivation and fosters a steady improvement in the quality of the work. Frazier and Paulson (1992) maintain that portfolios offer students a way to take charge of their learning by encouraging ownership, pride and high self-esteem.

### Grading

In an analysis of research on student ability, student background, and student achievement, Tomlinson (1981) concluded that the first aim of school should be to develop a cause-and-effect attribution between grades and the kind and amount of work that must be expended to get them. The second aim should be to enable children to make valid assessments of their abilities and to construct a set of expectations that reflects their ability conditioned by the amount of work they may reasonably be expected to perform on behalf of achievement. He emphasized that learning how to learn is as important, or even more important than, learning



itself, but it requires direct intervention and attention on the part of educators.

In the area of hidden curriculum, students have reported that they have been taught that the major goal was to acquire points for a letter grade. This causes a focus on merely completing assignments as opposed to what they were supposed to be learning (Burton, 1983). When reporting student progress to parents, Cassidy (1977) found that the least important factor was grades. This was viewed as not being very helpful or informative, especially if a low grade existed. Parents preferred to be informed of their children's attitudes toward learning, behavior at school and specific ways in which they needed to improve.

In a study of the letter grade system, Burton (1983) found that teachers also preferred alternatives to report student progress, such as checklists, written progress reports, and parent-teacher conferences. Simply reporting a letter grade leads to students setting goals for improving their grades in the future rather than focusing on improving the actual learning. In a similar study, Parkay (1987) concluded that a grading system based on the concept of "guaranteed success" resulted in improved attitudes toward the subject and reduced student resistance toward learning in general.

In most applications of Bloom's (1984) mastery learning, the major strength has been helping teachers become organized both prior to instruction, and afterward, as they seek to guarantee instructional congruence in the feedback, corrective, and enrichment processes. This complete phase takes place before any summative

evaluation is done and any permanent grades are taken (Guskey, 1988).

There is a need for frequent assessment of progress toward mastery of the concepts and skills being learned at school. Traditionally, grades have had the purpose of giving information regarding how a student is doing and they serve as a reward for hard work. In order to develop quality habits, bad grades should not be permanent. Students need to get used to making good grades in order to develop the habit (Glasser, 1990).

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit" (Covey, 1989, p. 46). This quote from Aristotle makes the reason for developing quality habits extremely clear. Habits have tremendous gravity pull--more than most people realize or would care to admit. The intersection of knowledge, skill, and desire together create habits which can work for us or against us. "Bad" habits can keep us from going where we want to go, but "good" habits can be used effectively to create the cohesiveness and order necessary to establish quality in lives (Covey, 1989).

To promote quality and good habits, grading should never be on the curve because students' grades should not depend on how well other students are doing. Brandt (1990) has suggested that the traditional competitive grading almost guarantees that large numbers of students will not do their best. He supports the idea that we give students recognition for what they have learned, not humiliation for what they have not learned. The emphasis would be placed on outcomes achieved rather than time spent or the number of

credits accumulated.

### OBE Assessment

Assessment, using the OBE model, should take place in the form of demonstrating mastery of process skills, not just content. The students have extended opportunities to master the outcomes, so that the emphasis is placed on producing high quality work to develop good habits. All students can be successful because they are not evaluated based on a comparison with other students. "From a transformational OBE perspective, students don't need daily grades, weekly grades, six-week grades, semester grades, and 'final' grades, they need the ability to demonstrate outcomes of significance that really matter in the long run and have their records show it when it happens" (Spady, 1991, p. 22).

Outcomes should not be activities, assignments, or averages. Outcomes should be performance-based in that they are stated in terms of what the students will be able to demonstrate which can be measured or observed, but not necessarily in the form of a test. The assessment process should be like measurements made in real life, such as the job market. All students should be able to master the outcomes--it is just a matter of "when;" the date that a student demonstrates mastery of an outcome should not be important (Spady, 1989a). One example is that most adults know how to ride a bike, but none of them learned it at exactly the same age. If it was not accomplished by age 5.3, practice continued until it was mastered.

Therefore, if educators correctly implement the OBE model, a shift in the grading paradigm must occur, because the assessment process is so different.

Many traditional educational thinkers cannot fathom:  
(1) simply documenting how well students ultimately learn to do something (rather than labelling and averaging all their initial attempts), and then  
(2) reporting those results explicitly--which means describing or summarizing the criteria that constituted the demonstration--rather than reducing the performance to an ambiguous label such as a grade. Nor can they fathom comparing each student's performance to each criterion on its own terms, without both amalgamating all of the criteria together and comparing the performance to those of others (Spady, 1991, p. 21).

#### Summary

Assessment is generally connected with where instructional emphasis is placed and how ways in which students are assessed need to be expanded. Authentic assessments make the testing process more meaningful and the ultimate goal for students should be self-evaluation. The purpose of assessment should be to develop quality habits, so grades should be given on the basis of students being evaluated using a predetermined standard instead of comparing students to each other. Teachers and parents also prefer alternatives to the letter grade system which could provide more specific information on what could be done to improve performance rather than just attaching a letter to each subject. OBE assessment focuses on demonstrating outcomes of significance in an authentic manner, but it requires a major shift in every aspect of the traditional grading paradigm on the part of teachers, parents, and students.

### Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the following areas have been explored in conjunction with their relationship to outcome-based education: (1) educational issues, (2) value of student input, (3) development of outcome-based education, (4) curriculum, (5) instruction, and (6) assessment. Information related to these areas has provided support for this study, leading to a better understanding of students' perceptions of needed school improvements and incorporating these ideas into the process of implementing outcome-based education.

## CHAPTER III

### PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

The purpose of this study was to examine students' opinions of the most desirable educational experiences and their perceptions of exit outcomes currently being proposed in one metropolitan mid-western school district. The rationale and assumptions which provide the foundation for this study, in combination with the importance of students' perceptions in the research process, do not lend themselves to measurement, predictability, standardized results, or scientific solutions. For this reason, qualitative methods and procedures were chosen to carry out this study.

#### Procedures

The grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used to design this study. The analytic procedures of grounded theory are designed to:

1. Build rather than only test theory.
2. Give the research process the rigor necessary to make the theory 'good' science.
3. Help the analyst to break through the biases and assumptions brought to, and that can develop during, the research process.
4. Provide the grounding, build the density, and develop the sensitivity and integration needed to generate a rich, tightly woven, explanatory theory that closely approximates the reality it represents (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 57).

In grounded theory, data collection and data analysis are tightly interwoven processes which occur simultaneously because the analysis directs the data needs.

#### Data Needs

The purpose of the study was to gain information about students' perceptions of their educational experiences, so it was necessary to locate potential participants. Letters were sent to the parents of local high school students, identified as possibly being willing to participate in this study. A meeting was held with those students who responded to explain the purpose of the research and to determine who would be interviewed.

During the process of interviewing students and analyzing their responses, it became apparent that there were scheduling problems with four of the students and additional students would be needed. New participants were chosen from the group of regular summer school students and from a dropout prevention program, both located at the same high school, but comprised of students from all three high schools in the district. The regular summer school students were attending for various reasons; they ranged from those who chose a variety of courses in the summer to those who needed to make up a course which they had not passed during the normal school year. The majority of the students in the dropout prevention program were students who had experienced difficulty in school during the normal school year and whose families were receiving federal financial assistance. These students were paid minimum wage as an incentive

to attend summer school and some of them were also placed in part-time jobs.

#### Population/Subjects

Efforts were made to select students who represented a diversity of gender, ethnic origin, socio-economic and academic achievement.

In the initial sampling, a researcher is interested in generating as many categories as possible, hence he or she gathers data on a wide range of pertinent areas. Later, the concentration is on development, density, and saturation of categories; here the data gathering is more focused on specific areas (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 178).

The heterogeneity represented in the sample helped to create a wide variety of perspectives and responses. The scheduling problem which arose with some of the students, upon reflection, proved beneficial because it actually created a wider range of diversity among the students being interviewed.

The subjects chosen for interviews were nine public high school students, five boys and four girls. Five were Caucasians, two African-Americans, one Native American, and one student who was half Native American and half African-American. Parents' occupations included a range from top-level management positions in national corporations to those who were unemployed and received AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children). Based on a 4.0 scale, their grade-point averages ranged from 1.5 to 4.4 (due to .2 extra being averaged in for each honors course).



### Data Collection Strategies

Initial interview questions (Appendix C) were based on an extensive review of literature and my own professional experiences. Students from this school district were personally interviewed and asked basically the same questions. Each interview began with very general questions related to perceptions of school and moved to very specific questions related to the various components of the exit outcomes proposed in the school district. As the interview process progressed, clarifying questions were asked to assess the validity of emerging categories from previous subjects' responses or to make new discoveries. Sample interview transcripts are included in Appendix D.

### Setting

The setting in this study was a suburban public high school in the school district in which the students were enrolled. The school was 14 years old and had been cited by the National School Recognition Program (U. S. Department of Education, 1988) as an exemplary secondary school. Approximately 1,300 students attended this high school which included grades 10, 11, and 12. Students attended this high school after spending three years at a junior high school which is fed by 6 of the 18 elementary schools in the district. Some students from across the district, which included two other high schools, attended summer school at this same high school.

As interview times and locations were arranged by phone, a discussion was held between the student and myself to clarify the purpose of the interview and to answer any questions. It was once again explained to the students that they could be assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and they were encouraged to answer all the questions as honestly and freely as possible.

Students were given their choice of locations and the times were agreed upon by both the students and myself. Interviews were conducted during non-school hours at the high school described in the study or at the elementary school where I was employed.

All of the students seemed apprehensive and nervous in the beginning, but they became more relaxed as demographic information was requested and seemed comfortable by the time the actual interview began. Most of the students expressed appreciation and excitement that someone actually wanted to know their opinion about school. Throughout the interviews, the students seemed to respond without hesitation, describing both positive and negative experiences they had encountered. Some of the students expanded on their answers more than others, but all of them were given the opportunity to say as much as they wanted in response to each question.

### Coding

The processes of data categorization were followed using the methods described by Strauss and Corbin (1990). To develop a grounded theory, data were categorized using the techniques involved

in open, axial, and selective coding. The procedures used in open coding are presented in this chapter.

Open coding was the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Each individual brings to the analysis of data that person's biases which can block the ability to see what is significant in the data. Certain techniques associated with open coding were used to prevent such problems. They included the use of questioning, analysis of phrases and sentences, and making comparisons.

In this study, open coding was accomplished by first using questioning to open up the data into many potential categories. The basic questions were: Who? When? Where? What? How? How Much? and Why? These questions were used to analyze the first interview with a line-by-line analysis generating the most possible categories. The various categories were named so that they were easy to remember, think about, and develop analytically. Initial names for the categories were written on transcribed interview notes and other documents collected and ranged from "hands-on projects" and "positive attitudes" to "benefit from AP classes" and "no benefit from Spanish." Envelopes were labeled with the names of each category and the related sections from the transcribed interviews were cut and sorted accordingly for each interview. When new information was discovered, it was added to previously established envelopes or new categories were created as needed.

By making additions to the categories, properties and dimensions were systematically developed to form the basis for the

subsequent making of relationships between categories and subcategories. As more interviews took place, the coding was done on the basis of sentences or paragraphs. The continuous development of categories was used as a guide for asking additional questions at upcoming interviews. Making close-in and far-out comparisons helped to develop dense theoretical explanations because the questions moved away from the standard ways of thinking (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This allowed for the exploration of other avenues of thought and gave new insights into the problem.

#### Reporting Methods

To ensure the confidentiality of the information given by the students, their names have been changed to reflect gender and overall position related to school. Considering their academic achievement, socio-economic status, and degree of involvement in extra-curricular activities, the three students who seemed to have everything going for them were given names which begin with the letter A (Adam, Alex and Anne). The three students from the dropout prevention program were all at the opposite end of the spectrum from the "A" students and were the only ones who qualified for monetary federal assistance. These students have been given names that begin with the letter C (Carol, Clint, and Connie). The remaining three students were classified in between these two groups and they have been given names that begin with the letter B (Beth, Bill, and Bruce).

Adam, Alex, and Anne each lived with both of their biological parents in affluent neighborhoods of the district. All of their fathers had relatively high level professional positions, with national corporations, which required at least a college bachelor's degree. Two of the mothers were housewives and one was a teacher at an elementary school. Their grade point averages ranged from 3.8 to 4.4, and they were all extremely active in school. For these three students, their extra-curricular activities included PEAK (the gifted and talented program), National Honor Society, Student Council president, varsity football, varsity basketball, varsity track, band, Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) secretary, Young Life, and Spanish Club.

Beth, Bill, and Bruce were also each living with both of their biological parents, but in more modest neighborhoods. Each of their fathers had middle level professional occupations, one of which required a masters' degree and the other two requiring at least two years of specific training beyond high school. Two of their mothers worked for churches and one was a vo-tech teacher. Their grade point averages ranged from 2.0 to 4.09, and they were all moderately active in school. For these three students, their extra-curricular activities included PEAK, National Honor Society, athletic trainer for the football and basketball teams, orchestra, Drama Club, Spanish Club, Pep Club, Art Club, and Bible Club.

Carol, Clint, and Connie were from single parent families with fathers who were unknown. They each lived in apartment complexes located in poorer sections of the district. None of their mothers

had jobs and all received monetary assistance from the federal government. Their grade point averages ranged from 1.7 to 3.5, and none of them were very active in school. For these three students, their extra-curricular activities included orchestra, Spanish Club, chorus, and junior varsity track.

#### Data Categorization

Two main categories emerged from the interviews: reflections on educational experiences and perspectives on learner outcomes. A variety of subcategories are included and quotes provide support for categorization.

#### Reflection on Educational Experiences

Through open coding, students' reflections on educational experiences have been grouped into three subcategories. These categories were related to students' opinions of the quality and amount of education they had, or desired to have, in the areas of overall, academic, and social preparation.

Overall Preparation. Most of the students considered the benefits of high school to be preparation for college and a place to make friends. Beth claimed that "going to school gave me the desire to go to college and want more than just being a housewife and mother." Carol expressed that school helped her to get ready to "go to college to be a CPA." Alex conveyed strong feelings about social preparation by explaining that "as far as relationships you build with your friends, I think that is what really prepares you for the

future--the things you go through at school which are not necessarily in the classroom."

The same two areas, specific academic subjects and a lack of social preparation, were also mentioned in students' descriptions of how they felt least prepared. They wanted better preparation in the areas of responsibility and organization (including note-taking and study skills), which students viewed as necessary for achieving success in college. Students also expressed opinions about unfavorable teaching practices. Bill asserted that some of the teachers' methods were not very helpful to him because "all of the busywork was easy, but it wasn't useful. . . . They should have taught us in different ways, instead of just using worksheets or textbook assignments."

Academic. The subject which was almost unanimously (seven of nine) mentioned as the area in which the students felt best prepared was math, attributing this success to their good teachers, personal interest, and/or individual strength. Math was mentioned by Clint who said, "they have prepared me very well, like in math. I am very well [sic] in math." However, Beth responded that the best areas for her were "English and pretty prepared in government classes, I guess because I like those the best."

The area almost unanimously (eight of nine) mentioned in which the students felt least prepared was science. They attributed this to their own lack of understanding, personal preference, or individual weakness. Carol expanded on why she felt least prepared in science by emphasizing that "they need to have a different way of

explaining it. . . . we mainly read the book and listen [sic] to the teacher talk about it. Sometimes we do experiments, but mostly I really don't understand it."

Areas which were viewed as having little worth, were basically those areas in which the students could not see any immediate or possible future use. Most students viewed the following as not being useful: higher level math skills, Spanish (or any foreign language), isolated skills in English like diagramming sentences, history as it is presently being taught (primarily memorization and "regurgitation" of facts), and busywork in the form of worksheets or assignments from the textbooks.

The areas mentioned in response to questions about what was not very beneficial were simply viewed as not being related to the students' own personal goals in life. Clint said, "I took Spanish and I probably will never use it." Beth replied that she did not see the use in "math, like finding inequalities or finding the factored form of 32. . . . I also don't see how diagramming a sentence and finding the prepositions and direct objects is going to be important in my life." Carol claimed that she did not think she would ever use the skills she learned in "orchestra (playing instruments) . . . choir and stuff like that."

Some students maintained that the problem of not being able to use what was being learned in some areas existed because of the methods by which they were being taught. Adam contended that learning about history could be made more useful:



if the class was taught differently in that the teacher could relate more to how the world is today and try to teach a lesson about what not to do today if you come to this point in your life. (One teacher) started out the year having us read the paper for the first fifteen minutes of class. . . . We would talk the whole hour about what was going on because that was during the Persian Gulf War. . . . It got me really interested in current events and I think that is what history is really about.

Social. Most of the students reported that they lacked an adequate amount of social preparation to handle the future. Bill contended that his area of least preparation was "socially branching out within the context of the entire school leading to different groups of people besides just your own group." Alex, the quarterback of a state championship football team, was the only exception to this. He felt well-prepared socially because "when you talk about life with your friends and coaches, I really learned a lot. I think I am better prepared because of football."

Several students emphasized the importance of being involved in extra-curricular activities. Adam stressed that

if there is anyway they could help you understand the importance of clubs (at the high school level), it would be good, because that's really what makes your life there more fun. . . . The people that I saw who did well in school were the ones who were really involved, because you are there more, you have more respect for what the school has to offer to you and you have more fun in your classes as well as in the clubs.

Summary. Overall, students perceived that they were best prepared academically, each elaborating on specific courses and skills in which they felt prepared. There were no questions related to specific courses and yet they mentioned certain subjects in many

of their responses, conveying an unstated definition of the high school curriculum as segregated into subjects rather than being generic concepts and skills.

Even though these students represented three different high schools, generally they felt best prepared in the area of math while their weakness was in the area of science. Math was also the area they liked the most and science was the area they liked the least. There were certain subjects and specific skills they viewed as lacking any real worth and considered including them in their school experiences to be a waste of time. They did not feel their school experiences had adequately prepared them socially and conveyed that extra-curricular activities played an extremely important role in helping students to do well in school.

#### Learner Outcomes Perspectives

The proposed exit outcomes from the school district described in this study were developed using a systematic process which included input from teachers, administrators, curriculum coordinators, and parents. An assessment of what students need to be successful in the future was transformed into six broad life skills which could be applied to any content area: community contributor, responsible citizen, collaborative worker, environmental protector, independent achiever, and quality producer. The complete list of outcomes and descriptions has been included as Appendix E.

Community Contributor. All of the students thought that various methods of establishing and maintaining relationships with family, friends, and society should be taught, but they had different opinions about who should teach such content. Most thought that relationship skills should be taught by both the family and school. Bruce said that these skills should be taught in school "because once you get out you are going to be dealing more socially with many people and you need to learn to deal with them before then." Connie said she thought relationship skills should be taught by the family and also at school "because if you learn a lot of stuff in school like that then I think you'll turn out better." Clint wanted these skills to be taught in school "because they should teach the basic things everyone needs to know, like the (dropout prevention) program does. They need to have things which are more training for students that you can really use."

Some believed it would be difficult to teach relationship skills at school and that these skills should not be required, because families may have already passed on their own values. Anne said, "I don't know if it would do much good to require everyone to take it . . . Hopefully their own parents and role models they meet like at church will teach some of this." Carol felt it should be an elective due to the fact that "some people already know this stuff, because they learn it at home so they don't need to take it at school." Regardless of whether they personally preferred to learn it at home or school, they all felt that it should be required at school for those who had not learned it at home, but they were

unsure about how to determine that definitely.

Responsible Citizen. While none of the students felt confident about their understanding of ways to participate in the democratic process in order to make positive changes which affect everyone, most said that such understanding was very important. Adam thought teaching about the democratic process was important "because I know voting percentages are really low. . . . If people know more about it then they will be more likely to vote and more apt to be involved with it."

Most of the students related learning about democratic processes to all forms of government, including the Student Council at school. Recognizing that only a few students were really involved in Student Council, most noted that democratic processes needed to be utilized more in the classrooms, providing an avenue for more student input into all of their educational experiences. Beth stated that school in general needed "to be more of a democracy where the students have more of a say into what happens. They need to ask the students what they think, what they want to learn, and how things could be better."

Collaborative Worker. The students felt that learning several techniques for using leadership skills and working in a group was an extremely important area, stressing how each one of them would have to use leadership and group skills frequently throughout their lives. Beth thought learning leadership skills was a valuable skill

because everybody will be a leader at some point in their lives. If you don't know how to be a leader of your people, then you are not going to be able to have success. . . . I think to be a good leader, you have to be a good follower. Leaders need to learn how to step out of the way and let other people take over for a while. Everyone has some good ideas and something to contribute. I have had more opportunities to do this in church than in school.

Beth expanded on this answer by explaining the reason this happened at church was that she was given the opportunity there. She said leadership skills had not been afforded her because she was not in any honors classes.

Anne described the benefits of Leadership Development Institute (LDI), an annual school retreat, where group and leadership skills are taught. She stated that

they split people into groups and the groups are chosen very carefully with people who don't really know each other and a lot of the people who are really strong leaders in the school either already know or are encouraged to kind of hang back and not really take over the group. People do come forward and lead the group and good leaders do come out of that who otherwise wouldn't have even thought about organizing something or getting things together. . . . I think that if it is at all possible to give everyone a situation like the one at this retreat then it would be very beneficial. You have to pay to go to this and it is over a weekend, so not everyone goes.

Many of the students expressed a need for everyone to have opportunities to be a leader, not just a chosen few or the ones who were "naturals" at it. Clint explained that when he was younger he got to be the leader more often

but now there are more people in my classes and the smarter ones always get to be the leader. Some teachers used to know me very well and they would pick me the very first time because I might be their favorite in the class, but the ones now don't know me very well, so they don't pick me.

I think everyone should have an opportunity to be the leader.

Most of the students believed they learned better in a group.

Connie explained the benefits she had gained from working in a group, noting that

in my Algebra class (the teacher) would give us a worksheet and we would have to work out the problems at our own speed in the group. We had to discuss the answers and if we had different answers then we had to keep working until we all could agree on one answer. This really helped me learn it better because if I had to do it by myself all the time I wouldn't have understood it, but now I do.

The advantages of learning to work in a group were connected to the future by almost all of the students. Adam related his perceptions about using this life skill

like out in the business world, everything now is on such a large scale level that you have to work in groups to get all the work done. It's a skill that I really haven't learned that well, and it should be taught, especially with the way the world is proceeding now whether it's the independent business man or a large corporation.

There were some reservations about spending too much time in what could be a group with some bad people (those who did not do their part or who caused trouble). Bill believed it was not good to be in groups all of the time "because you could get stuck with some bad people, then you are going to suffer. Of course, I guess that is real life, so on occasion I think it's good."

Environmental Protector. Students expressed an awareness of the possibility of serious future problems related to the environment, but they reported that they did not know very much about it. The students believed instruction in this area should

probably be included in one of the science classes. Connie said, "I think they should teach about it because it has to do with our future." Anne recommended dedicating "about a week or a few days in a required course like science to go over the statistics so everyone would know about ecology. Then the class can also be offered for those who want to take it for a whole semester."

Independent Achiever. Most of the students expressed a strong opinion about how they believed learning how to learn was what school was supposed to be about, instead of just reading from a textbook. Alex contended that

back in elementary school and junior high school all we did was get the book, like science, and read it and answer questions. We didn't really learn anything, at least not anything that I can remember that was very useful or interesting. It was just all out of the book and I think school should be more like it is in life. . . . It wasn't until high school that we really had some chances to get involved in some of the things we were learning about. I think it would really help people out if there were more things you could really do to learn things instead of just reading the book.

Learning methods for gathering and using information was viewed as being able to face a problem and work from all angles to solve it. Anne described the benefits of teaching problem-solving skills by explaining that

it's a lot easier to have a project like that where you can experiment on your own and the students don't even realize they are learning. It's one thing to give them a problem and tell them the steps, and even if they pay attention and learn it then, it will still be lost in a few days. But if they really have their hands on it then they don't know that they are learning and it stays with them a lot longer.

All of the students related that they learned a lot more when they were involved in these types of meaningful activities related to the subject matter and that more of this was needed in school. Connie related this area to the benefits she received from making "bridges in science to see which one would hold the heaviest stuff. First we were reading about it and it wasn't exciting . . . but, then you really see how people have to make bridges and have all these problems they have to work out." Bill thought research skills and problem-solving techniques needed to be taught more "because I only got this in my honors classes and the regular students never got this."

Quality Producer. Students stated that the schools did not stress high quality in pursuit of all achievements; instead, just finishing the assignments seemed to be the main goal. Adam explained that

in school I find that they don't really emphasize doing your best. I have gotten that from my home. . . . I know a lot of people who don't get that from home, so if there were some way it could be put into the schools, it would help a lot. So many kids don't get the kind of support that I do.

Clint described the benefits of stressing quality on all school assignments

because whoever guesses on the answers might not really know it and the next level they go to they won't be able to do it right. I have been able to do my work over in my science class. He would explain it again and then give us a different assignment and not count the other one. This helped us get good grades.



Reservations were expressed as to whether certain students would respond favorably to being given the opportunity to redo assignments until the concept was mastered, but most felt this was necessary to really learn it. Bill believed it would be beneficial to emphasize this area "only in elementary. By the time they get into high school, they are going to be set in their ways, so this won't help." Carol thought it depended "on the person who is doing it. Sometimes the person might do it worse the second time. It would help if the person really wanted to know what was wrong and how to do it right."

Summary. Students generally had favorable comments on all of the exit outcomes being proposed by the school district in this study. They were especially in favor of learning to become a collaborative worker by having more opportunities to develop leadership skills and work cooperatively in groups of students. Learning to be an independent achiever, using a variety of sources to solve problems, was also viewed as an extremely important priority for them. Students stated that learning to be a responsible citizen and a quality producer were significant and should be included in their school experiences. Learning to be a community contributor and an environmental protector were both viewed as notable, but they did not necessarily think they should be required for every student.

As they did during their reflection on educational experiences, the students also attempted to connect part of the proposed outcomes to a certain school subject. Many of them linked Community

Contributor to Home Economics, Responsible Citizen to History/Government, and Environmental Protector to Science, instead of viewing them as broad goals which could be applied to any course of study.

#### Weakness in Science

The initial categories used in the open coding process revealed that students felt prepared in most academic areas. However, the findings indicated that students felt least prepared in science. Students' feelings of inadequacy in science had not been reviewed in the literature prior to the interviews. Because this opinion was mentioned so frequently, related studies on science were investigated.

Mullis and Jenkins (1988) reported that ". . . by grade 11, almost half of the students have decided not to take any more science courses, few spend time on independent science-related hobbies or activities, and only about half think that what is learned in science class is useful in everyday life" (p. 13).

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), almost half of the nation's students leave their middle school experiences without understanding basic information like the effect of different soils on plants or the concept of buoyancy. Even worse, fewer than 10 percent of our 17-year-olds leave high school with the understanding of biology, chemistry, and physics necessary to pursue engineering and scientific programs in college (Anrig & Lapointe, 1989).

Anrig and Lapointe's (1989) interpretations of the NAEP findings can be applied to the area of science, as well as other areas. They indicated the following:

1. The role of students is largely passive, with teacher lecture, or teacher presentation of problems, being the most common forms of instruction.

2. Question/answer teaching, workbooks, rote learning, and textbook-based teaching may raise minimum performance, but they do not improve skills in higher-order thinking.

3. During science classes, students should be learning to hypothesize or interpret data at least weekly, going on scientific field trips, writing up the results of science experiments, using a laboratory for science, and receiving quality instructional interaction.

The NAEP's findings can be used as suggestions for making improvements beginning with students' general experiences as learners. Some of the recommendations made by Anrig and Lapointe (1989) included:

1. Examining instructional practices from the perspective of what an individual student experiences.

2. Looking at what is taught and assigned with an eye toward creativity, higher-order thinking, and problem-solving.

3. Seeking integration of instruction, rather than "layer-cake" curriculum.

4. Rededicating ourselves to John Dewey's concept of "learning by doing."

### Summary

The literature related to the rationale behind students' weaknesses in science represents the same kinds of reasons given by students in this study for when they have difficulty with school in general. If the majority of students' experiences, related to a particular course or set of skills, have been teacher-directed, centered around lower level thinking skills, and lacking in opportunities for students to interact with each other, then the amount of learning has been kept to a minimum.

### Chapter Summary

The data presented in this chapter provided the foundation for the study. All of the students had well-formulated opinions related to almost every question. No differences or patterns were found to exist between the various classification groups. Using open coding, two main categories emerged, the first of which was the students' reflection on educational experiences from overall preparation, academic and social viewpoints. The other category was learner outcomes perspectives described for each of the exit outcomes on the list proposed by the school district under study.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

In this chapter, grounded theory procedures were used to create an inductively derived model from the phenomena generated during the research process. The first part of the analysis process involved the procedures of open coding, presented in Chapter III. Through this process, students' responses were divided into categories and subcategories according to their range and dimensions. This chapter presents the analysis techniques of axial and selective coding and the development of a conditional matrix.

#### Axial Coding

Axial coding took place by performing four separate yet almost simultaneous steps: (1) using a paradigm model to develop the relationships of categories; (2) verification of those relationships against data; (3) development of categories and subcategories; and (4) linking of categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

#### The Paradigm Model

The paradigm model was used to move back and forth constantly between inductive and deductive thinking through questioning. Axial coding, using the paradigm model, focused on the phenomenon of students' perceptions of school; the causal conditions

that gave rise to it; the context in which it was embedded; the intervening conditions associated with the phenomenon; the action/interactional occurrences by which it was handled, managed, and/or carried out; and the consequences of those occurrences (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The paradigm model has been explained in the following sections and is visually presented in Figure 1.

Phenomenon. Students' perceptions of school was the phenomenon being examined in this study.

Causal conditions. Causal conditions were the events or incidents that led to the occurrence or development of the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Events which led to the development of students' perceptions of school were the causal conditions created by specific school and life experiences. Students perceived "school" to have various positive and negative aspects depending upon their points of view, their unique contexts, and their individual experiences.

Context. Students' perceptions of school were reported and developed under basically two contextual conditions--in the classrooms and during extra-curricular activities.

Students' opinions of classroom activities depended upon their interest in the particular subject matter and their feelings about individual teachers. Anne explained that she felt well-prepared in "math, because the math teachers are excellent, so I feel like I am really strong in my math background." When asked about the area in which she felt least prepared, Anne claimed that it was "science,

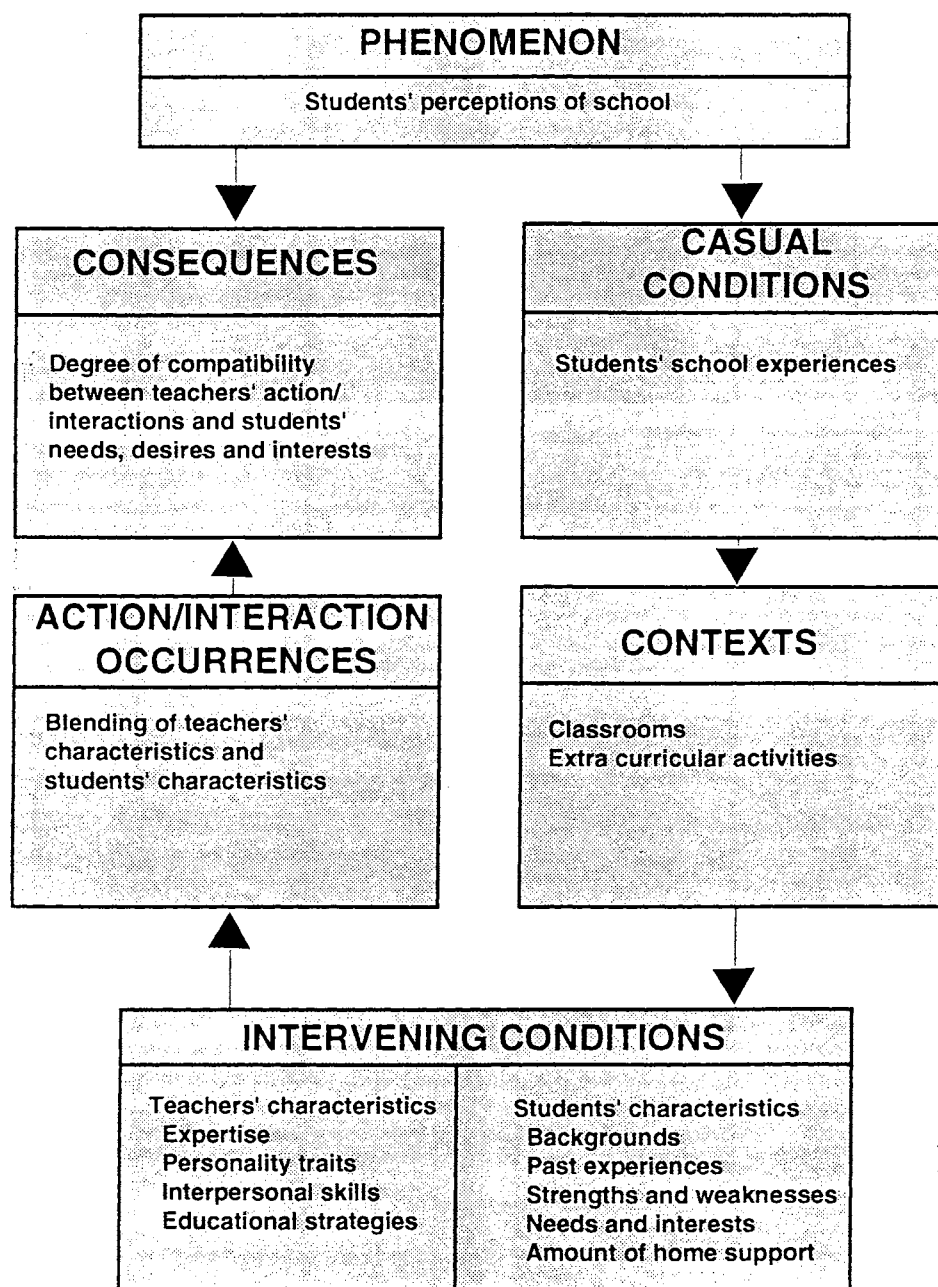


Figure 1. Results of Axial Coding: The Paradigm Model

because I am not really interested in it, so I only took what was required." Classroom experiences focused on required courses, electives, and honors or advanced placement (AP) courses, which were available only to a few students who met specific qualifications determined by the school district.

Extra-curricular activities were considered to be all of the activities which were sponsored by the school, but took place outside of the regular classrooms. The various activities mentioned could be classified into groups according to how students initiated involvement. There were clubs which could simply be joined, positions which entailed a "try-out" process, and offices which involved an election by peers. When asked about extra-curricular activities, Carol explained this process: "students could just be in things like the Spanish Club, but you have to try-out for other things, like the cheerleaders and some sports. . . . Sometimes, everybody votes to see if you get to be the president of Student Council, or things like that."

Intervening Conditions. Intervening conditions were the broad and general conditions which facilitated or constrained a specific context. These conditions could include time, space, culture, economic status, technological status, career, history, and individual biography (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In this study, two sets of intervening conditions existed within the identified contexts of classrooms and extra-curricular activities: unique characteristics pertaining to teachers and unique characteristics of students.



Teachers, or activity sponsors, used certain expertise, personality traits, interpersonal relationship skills, and educational strategies to handle their daily classroom routine and extra-curricular activities. Teachers made curriculum, instruction, and assessment decisions which affected the students' experiences and perceptions on a daily basis. Bruce described activities which helped him, like

in math, when the teacher had us take tests and then the people who understood it would be matched up with the people who didn't understand it very well so they could teach it to them. This gave the teacher a chance to walk around the room and work with students by themselves, or with two or three, who understood it vaguely, but still needed some additional help.

Students' unique backgrounds, past experiences, individual strengths and weaknesses, personal needs and interests, and amount of support or pressure from home were all considered as intervening conditions which affected their perceptions of school. Adam explained that his desire to do well in school came from the help his mom gave him because

she would push me to do my best. I know a lot of people who don't get that from home, so if there were some way that emphasis could be put into the school, it would help a lot. So many kids don't get the kind of support that I do.

Action/Interaction Occurrences. A range of four distinct sets of action/interactional occurrences were investigated. The first type was processual, having evolved in nature, such as when Clint described how he no longer had opportunities to be a leader. This was not a planned event, but just something that happened.

The second type was purposeful and goal oriented, done for some reason to manage a phenomenon, such as the LDI (leadership retreat). This was a planned event for the purpose of developing leadership skills, but students expressed concern that not all students were allowed to attend.

The third type was failed action/interaction. It was just as important to look for failed action, as action that had taken place or occurred, such as the quality of activities in the AP classes versus rote memorization in some of the other classes. This occurrence was worthy of examination both when it occurred and when it failed to occur.

The fourth type was the way in which intervening conditions either facilitated or constrained action/interaction, such as the reduction of class size. This condition intervened with the expressed purpose of facilitating positive action/interaction.

Consequences. Action/interaction taken in response to a phenomenon had certain results or consequences (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Not surprisingly, the more teachers' actions/interactions were compatible with students' needs, desires, and interests, the more positive were the students' perceptions of school. For instance, when the substitute teacher used instructional methods which got the students actively involved by having them act in the role of the teacher part of the time, their grades improved.

Conversely, the more teachers' actions/interactions were in conflict with students' needs, desires, and interests, then the more negative were the students' perceptions of school. For instance,

when history was being taught as facts and dates to memorize, students were not as interested as when it was taught in relation to current events.

Summary. In axial coding, the nature of the questions asked helped to denote the type of relationship between the subcategories and a category. Categories emerged as a result of axial coding and they were depicted in the form of the paradigm model. The causal conditions were students' school experiences from which the phenomenon of students' perceptions of school were formed. The context involved the regular classroom or extra-curricular activities. The intervening conditions were the individual characteristics of teachers and students. The action/interaction occurrences were related to the blending of teachers' methods and students' needs, desires, and interests. The consequences were the degree to which teachers' actions/interactions corresponded with students' preferences.

#### Verification of Relationships

##### Against Data

In the process of developing the paradigm model, statements of relationships were deductively proposed and then verified against data by data comparing incidents. Three themes emerged from this process in the form of students' desires for student input or choice, meaningful school experiences, and social development.

Desire for Student Input/Choice. The students communicated a need to be able to voice their opinion more often by having regular input into school-related matters. Beth stated that

there is more choice needed. If I ever became a teacher I think the first thing I would have my students do is to write down on a piece of paper what they want to learn. They are the ones who are going to be learning it and I couldn't make them do it. They have to be interested in it, so they can have the discipline to do it.

They wanted more choices on such matters as classroom assignments, course requirements, and extra-curricular activities. Alex reported positive results occur

if kids get to choose more of what they do, because when they are just told a bunch of things to do, then they want to rebel. At least if there was a list of things we could pick from when we have to do essays, instead of just being told what the topic is. . . . if I could have picked, I would have selected to do a course over any of the things we talked about today (referring to the proposed exit outcomes).

Desire for Meaningful School Experiences. Students stated that they never really discussed why they were learning about the things their teacher assigned. Carol communicated the example that, in

Oklahoma History, there is just no way to use this. At least we never talked about how we could use it like in a job or anywhere away from school. We just do it because the teacher tells us to and we really don't know why. I wish they would explain more why we are doing things and have less book work. If you have things to do where you are involved in it, then you will remember it better.

Students believed that discussions of how skills could be used in their lives away from school would help in the areas of motivation, understanding, and recall of information. Beth

explained that "we never really discuss the benefit of learning anything in our classes. It has just always been an assignment, like a chapter in the book. I think it would help people be more motivated and it would help them understand it better."

The students stated that studying history was only valuable for them in terms of making better decisions about things happening in their lifetimes. Carol claimed that "it is better if we can look at what is happening now and figure out what they did a long time ago, so it doesn't happen again. This would make it better and more interesting."

They believed history classes would be more meaningful if they used history to study current events, instead of just studying history. Beth argued that historical events

can be studied and if people have to make a decision about today, what's going on now, then that could help them. In school we really just studied what happened a long time ago and we never considered how it was related to today. I just think this would make it more meaningful and interesting instead of just having assignments.

Desire for Social Development. The students expressed extremely strong feelings about the importance of extra-curricular activities. Alex maintained that people

downplay things like athletics and I don't really know why, except that I don't really think they understand what it's all about. . . . like when we won the state championship this year. We probably weren't as talented as a lot of teams we played, but our desire to do it brought us really close together. A lot of things like working in groups and building leadership skills can be learned through extra-curricular activities. The people who aren't really involved in these activities are the ones who have a hard time and probably don't

have as good of an experience in high school. You really do learn a lot . . . sports really gives you that extra push to do well in school to make your grades and stay out of trouble.

Students also believed they did better in their classes by participating in extra-curricular activities. Connie related that "it does help when you get really involved in things at school, because then you learn more in the classes and in the activities." Clint stressed that "sports helps your mind. When you don't make your grades, you don't play. Then it helps make your mind up whether to play and mostly all of them want to play so they try harder."

Students who were not as involved in these activities were perceived as not having as good an experience in high school as those who were very involved. Bill noted his feelings that "the different cliques should have to work together on things like the group projects . . . it would make it a more pleasant school and everyone would learn to work together like we will have to when we get jobs in the future." Beth pointed out that being involved in activities in high school

can help when you apply for college, because I always heard, "Get involved in everything," and I think colleges know that in groups like this you learn leadership skills and how to get along with people. . . . I also think it just helps with the whole school experience.

Summary. Across a variety of responses, students expressed a desire for input/choice, meaningful school experiences, and social development. These themes were consistent with responses given by all students.

Development of Categories  
and Subcategories

Examining the data led to evidence of other properties that existed besides the ones uncovered during open coding. In this study, students were introduced to the school district's proposed exit outcomes of learning to be a community contributor, responsible citizen, collaborative worker, environmental protector, independent achiever, and quality producer. After these outcomes were individually described and students were given the opportunity to express their opinions about each of them, they were asked about their reactions to moving toward a system of emphasizing outcomes such as these.

Overwhelmingly, the students were in favor of emphasizing meaningful outcomes in school and abandoning the practices of completing "worthless" assignments just to receive a grade. Many students expressed a feeling of almost being "cheated" out of something they really needed to be successful in the future. Referring to working in groups, building relationships, and developing research skills, Alex stressed that

you can't just wait until you get into college or get a job to learn how to do these kinds of things. You need it at all levels of school. I know you can't get totally away from the facts, but you can cut down on memorizing a lot of that stuff . . . I wish I would have had something like these things instead. It would have been more helpful to me.

Beth related her view that, "in the junior and senior year, they need to take the same old stuff out and put in more of this practical stuff. This will help more later on."

The proposed outcomes were generally viewed as providing opportunities to really be involved in classroom activities, rather than just hearing a lecture from the teacher or reading it from a textbook on their own. Connie described her feelings that,

when the teacher is just talking or you just have to read out of a book, then you don't get that much out of it. My Spanish teacher did this, and then she had a sub. He got us really involved in it, by having us do all these things and then people's grades came up. Then when she came back, people's grades went right back down. Like the sub had us be the teacher and you learn it better when you are the teacher. I had to really get it in my head to know what I am going to tell the students. I have to know what it means, so I can teach it to them.

Anne stressed that it is important for students to associate school with something other than

bookwork and worksheets. . . . They need things besides just memorizing things because it is good for their whole attitude about school. It makes them more interested in the whole thing. . . . I think that through a lot of these activities they can figure out what they are really good at.

The students recognized a need for learning purely factual information, but they believed it could be accomplished by doing some of these things and the facts would just naturally be picked up, rather than having to concentrate on memorizing them. Bruce related that

there should be more emphasis on leadership and probably equal emphasis on other things. Like I feel instead of paying money for LDI and going on the weekend, we should set aside one day at school where the entire school got to do it and it didn't cost a thing. . . . It would be better to have this and less time spent on so many facts.

Adam pointed out that there needs to be a good balance of mastering meaningful outcomes and learning factual information. He



explained that he had a pretty good balance in school

but I was in all honors and AP classes, so I think that has made a lot of difference. . . . Like being in honors, normally there was a large project that you had to do and those are the skills that you are talking about that need to be developed.

Bill expressed that "it would be ideal if they could teach the facts in order to teach the leadership skills and those things. It would be best to do them both at the same time."

Summary. Through axial coding, categories and subcategories were further developed by examining the students' reactions to the proposed outcomes. Students felt that focusing on mastering these outcomes would be better than the current system which emphasizes assignment completion and grades. They viewed concentrating on these outcomes as actively involving them in school by emphasizing skills they could use in the future.

#### Linking Categories

The last step in axial coding was the process of linking together all of the major categories in preparation for selective coding. The discovery and specification of differences among and within categories, as well as category similarities, provided a crucial piece of coding which was at the heart of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). There was constant movement back and forth between proposing statements of relationships and verifying them for support in the data. In this study, the categories were linked together to identify the overall message from students which

was their desire for a personally relevant education for all students. As a result of linking categories, common issues were identified as focus, access, and relevancy.

Focus. Students' opinions of the quality of various courses were related to whether it focused on critical thinking or rote memorization. Most of the higher level thinking skills and challenging activities were believed to take place only in the honors or AP classes. Many students expressed dissatisfaction in having most of the "good stuff" available only in the honors and AP classes. Also, they felt that a lot of time was wasted in the regular classes which could be used to include more of these challenging activities. They expressed a need to spend less time memorizing facts and more time learning the types of processes they will really be able to use in the future.

Access. Another issue which linked categories was related to who had access to certain courses. Students wanted to be involved in addressing the dilemma of determining who is eligible to take the honors and AP classes. They suggested high standards be maintained for the students who have enrolled in the course, but students should be allowed to choose to be in there if they wanted to work harder than what was required in the regular classes. Beth argued that

honors classes are discrimination. . . . you should be able to have the same opportunities. . . . you should have a choice to be able to take whatever class you want. They (the teachers) shouldn't be the ones who decide, because they don't know the person. Maybe they (the students) are just not trying and if they were in the honors classes,

they would be more interested and try harder.

Relevancy. The issue of relevancy also linked categories.

Students wanted their education to be related to their own needs and interests. They felt things had little value for them if it was uninteresting and/or not connected to ways in which they personally could use it. Even though Alex said he was really good in math, he felt there was no use for

math and trig. Like accounting you can really use and psychology is really helpful in life, but in the English classes that literary stuff I really didn't care for because I really don't see why you need to know that stuff. Mainly the trig and English are the ones that I didn't understand what the point of learning it was.

Summary. Linking categories through the issues of focus, access, and relevancy provided the final step in the axial coding process. These issues were the pieces which linked categories to identify the overall desire for a personally relevant education for all students.

### Summary

Axial coding was achieved using a paradigm model which identified the core category as students' perceptions of school based on their school experiences in classrooms and extra-curricular activities. Characteristics of teachers and students affected the degree to which teachers' methods corresponded with students' needs, desires, and interests. From the axial coding, three emergent themes were explored against further data to establish the validity

of students' desire for input, meaningful school experiences, and social development. To further develop the categories, students' reactions to the proposed outcomes were examined. Finally, to link categories, the issues of focus, access, and relevancy were used to identify the primary message as the desire for a personally relevant education for all students.

#### Selective Coding

Selective coding repeated the same processes which were used in axial coding, but at a more inductively general level. Integration of data was accomplished by formulating a story line (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Findings showed that from the perspective of high school students, a variety of things could be done to improve the process of education. Their story line was represented as a desire to have a personally relevant education provided for all students.

Overall, students wanted their education to provide more realistic and practical experiences linked to their own future needs. They expressed a desire for routine opportunities for input, meaningful school experiences, and organized social development. These three new, but related, categories emerged and ultimately will form the conditional matrix which follows this section on selective coding. Within these categories, various subcategories describe issues and concerns expressed in students' responses, as well as the possible solutions they provided.

### Routine Opportunities for Student Input

Students communicated a need for an increase in the flexibility of educational programs to meet their personal needs and more opportunities for student input into all aspects of their school experiences. They felt student input was needed because different students have a variety of goals for their educational experiences, and the only way to identify what each of them want would be to get input from each one of them. Students perceived problems related to their individual needs and interests, areas in which they were least prepared, and feelings of helplessness to solve school problems.

Individual Needs and Interests. Students felt they were not recognized as each having a unique set of future plans, interests, strengths, and weaknesses which affected their perceptions of educational needs. A wide variety of things were mentioned because students felt best prepared in areas which represented their own interests and strengths, rather than what the school itself had emphasized. The one exception was math in which many students attributed their good preparation to their outstanding teacher. Students expressed a desire for more of a say as to what happens and a need for more opportunities to select courses and class activities which could meet their individual needs.

Least Prepared Areas. The most frequently mentioned areas in which students felt least prepared were responsibility, organizational skills (including note-taking and study skills), and science. Facing the new challenges of college and careers in the

near future, many students expressed an urgent need to be more organized and responsible. Most did not feel these skills had been taught or learned during their school experiences. Science was the subject most frequently mentioned as the area they felt they did not understand. Suggestions for improvement in these areas ranged from adding courses to teaching the skills in different ways, depending upon their individual needs.

Helpless to Solve School Problems. Many students expressed a feeling of helplessness when a problem existed at school, especially if they did not have a strong support system at home. Students communicated various types of problems they had at school, but most did not feel they were able to do anything about the situation. Problems included having difficulty learning in the manner teachers used to teach, not being interested in what was being taught, and feeling as though they were constantly being told what to do. Students suggested that having more choices related to their educational experiences would help to improve their attitude and motivation associated with school.

Summary. Students did not just want education to be changed to fit their needs, but they wanted it to be flexible enough to fit the needs of all students. They believed that if students were given routine opportunities for input into decisions related to their education, then problems could more easily be solved associated with meeting individual needs and interests, improving areas of lowest

preparation, and dealing with their feeling of helplessness to solve school problems.

#### Meaningful School Experiences

Building on the desire for routine student input, many of the students' responses communicated a need for an increase in the amount of meaningful school activities. This included a need for discussing the significance of what they were learning and how it could be used in a variety of applications outside of the classroom. Students' responses were related to improving the value of various content areas, instructional methods, and challenging activities.

Value of Content Areas. Certain subjects were not seen as having any value. The specific subjects varied from student to student, but those mentioned most frequently were history, Spanish, advanced math, English literature, and isolated English skills, such as diagramming sentences. Students expressed that they had a serious lack of knowledge about why they were asked to learn most of what they had done at school. They claimed teachers did not emphasize future use, so no value was attached to the subjects in which the use was not easily seen by the students.

To improve the value of various content areas, students suggested that a discussion about the relationship between each skill and its use outside of school take place regularly. Suggested examples for how these subjects could be made more meaningful were history being taught in terms of its impact on current events and English skills being taught in terms of their use in writing, with

the emphasis being placed on the steps in the writing process.

Value of Instructional Methods. Most assignments from textbooks, worksheets, and other similar activities were seen as busywork with no real learning taking place. Most students stated they did not get much out of lectures or reading from a textbook.

To improve the value of instructional methods, students felt it was more beneficial to be involved in worthwhile activities which provided real opportunities to learn about life and how to deal with real-life issues. Suggestions included using hands-on projects to find alternatives to current problems, debating both sides of an issue, group investigations, research assignments including personal interviews, and having the students be the teachers, which they claimed caused them to learn a lot more.

Value of Challenging Activities. Much of the higher level thinking skills and learning which was challenging was believed to take place only in the honors or AP classes. Many students expressed dissatisfaction in having most of the "good stuff" available only in the honors and AP classes. Some felt it was discrimination to allow only certain students into these classes.

To improve the value of challenging activities, the suggestion from the students was to maintain high standards for the students enrolled in the courses, but to allow the students to choose to be enrolled if they wanted to work harder than what was required in the regular classes. Also, they felt that a lot of time was wasted in the regular classes which could be used to include more of these



challenging activities. They felt a need to spend less time memorizing facts and more time learning the types of processes they would really be able to use in the future.

Summary. If students were given meaningful school experiences then problems could more easily be solved associated with the value of content areas, instructional methods, and challenging activities. Providing meaningful school experiences was one of the ways a more personally relevant education could be provided for all students.

#### Organized Social Development

Building on the ideas of routine student input and meaningful school experiences, students communicated a need for an increase in the amount of organized social development. Perceived problems in the area of social development were related to socializing with friends, ways to build relationships, and opportunities to learn in groups.

Socializing with Friends. Socializing with friends was viewed as an important part of the educational process by students, but it seemed to be kept to a minimum by educators. They felt the importance of having many opportunities to interact in various ways with other people had not been recognized as a priority in the current educational process.

Most students felt very strongly about the positive value of extra-curricular activities. They claimed that the purpose of these activities was not only for fun and socializing, but that they

learned a lot from their participation in clubs and on teams. It was suggested that more of these types of activities actually take place in the classroom in an organized manner, such as the leadership activities which, in the past, have taken place over one weekend per year for only a certain portion of the student body.

Ways to Build Relationships. According to the students, different ways to master the process of building relationships have not been provided for all students to a satisfactory level. Building relationships at school was primarily accomplished during the club and team events, but not all students participated in these extra-curricular activities.

The students saw a need for more extra-curricular activities which were geared to different interests. They wanted suggestions to be given by the students so that activities could be provided for those who have not previously been very involved. They also felt this was important because colleges evaluate each person's extra-curricular activities as a part of the process for admission.

Opportunities to Learn in Groups. Students expressed that more opportunities to learn in groups and work on group projects were needed. They felt the value of learning and developing cooperative skills in groups has not been recognized as a priority in the current educational process. Students expressed a desire to interact with all types of students, so they could get to know people who are in "other groups." They felt they would need this skill when they entered the world of work where keeping their jobs

would depend upon being able to work with all types of people.

Summary. If the amount of organized social development were increased, then problems could more easily be solved related to socializing with friends, ways to build relationships, and opportunities to learn in groups. An emphasis on organized social development was one of the ways a more personally relevant education could be provided for all students.

#### Summary

Selective coding was the procedure used to conceptualize a story line which communicated the students' perceptions of school and possible solutions to problems they had encountered. Students did not necessarily feel it was important to dictate exactly what they would be taught in school, because as students they did not necessarily know what they needed to learn. However, they did want to learn concepts and skills which were useful and they expressed a strong desire to know why they were learning them.

Students wanted to be actively involved in meaningful activities which they thought would improve their ability to learn. They conveyed a need to have input into decisions which affected their education and to create appropriate avenues to address school problems they faced rather than just having to put up with them. The strongest desire expressed was to increase their social development through more frequent opportunities to socialize during their educational experiences, learn different ways to build relationships with various types of people, and acquire cooperative

group skills which included practicing desirable methods of leadership.

#### Conditional Matrix

The conditional matrix was developed as an analytic diagram which captured the dominant conditions and consequences bearing upon the identified phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In this study, students' perceptions of school was the phenomenon being investigated. Strategies involved in developing a conditional matrix were used to create a Model of Personally Relevant Education which has been included as Figure 2.

To create a personally relevant education, the students felt it was necessary to first provide routine opportunities for student input to incorporate their definition of meaningful school experiences and need for organized social development. Within that framework, students desired flexibility and choices which incorporated their individual needs and interests into course requirements, extra-curricular activities, and class assignments. They wanted emphasis to be placed on providing a real-life context for learning which prepared them for future challenges leading to academic success and beyond.

#### Chapter Summary

Analysis and interpretation of the data were accomplished by completing the processes of axial coding, selective coding, and developing a conditional matrix which resulted in the development of

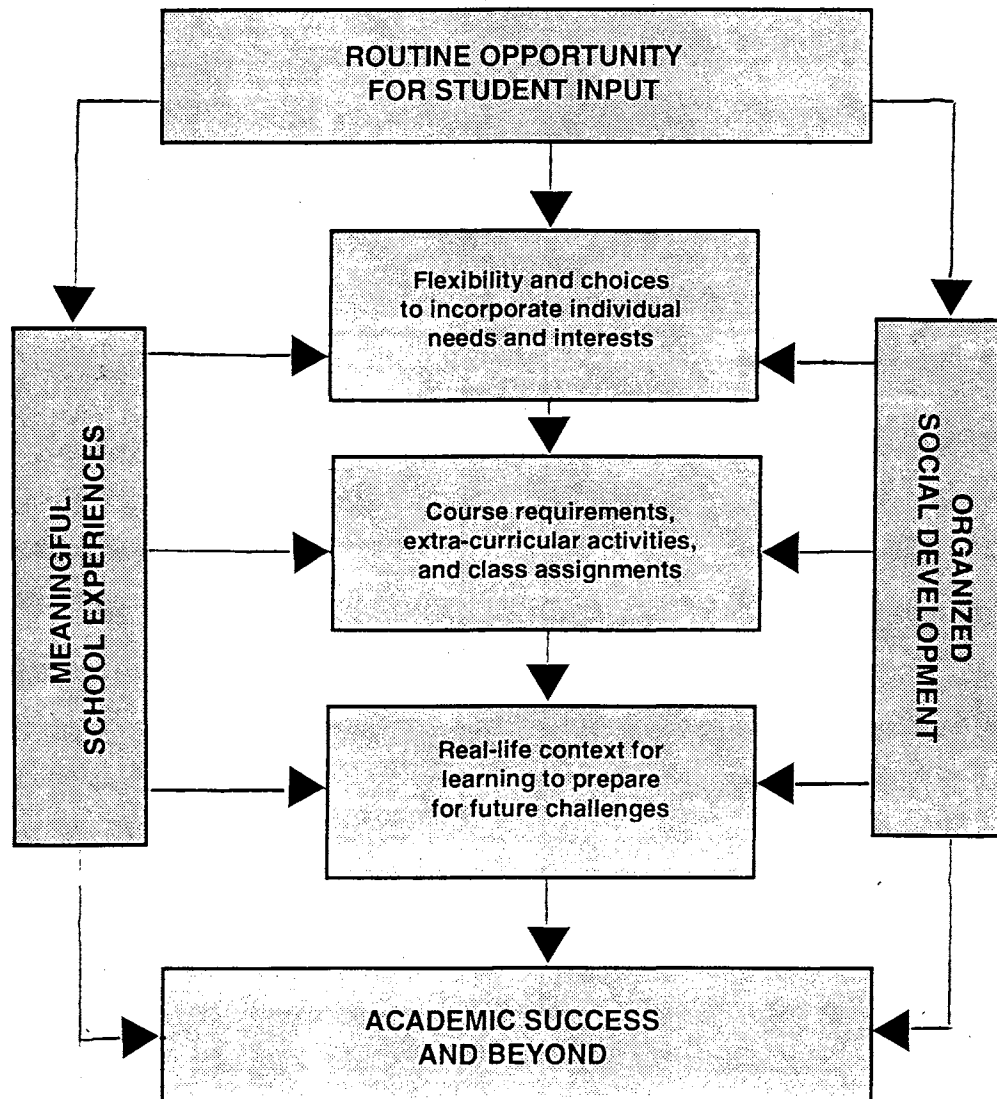


Figure 2. Model for Personally Relevant Education

a grounded theory. This theory was limited to the categories, their properties and dimensions, and statements of relationships that existed in the actual data collected. The categories and subcategories have been integrated into a Model of Personally Relevant Education which described the students' perceptions of what they would like for schools to do for them. This model will be examined further in Chapter V.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

A body of literature and research has indicated that students should have a voice in their school experiences. Literature related to outcome-based education refers to gathering input from teachers, parents, and administrators, but does not mention students. The absence of this key component has provided the basis for this study--the examination of students' perceptions of their educational experiences. This chapter presents a summary of the study, along with discussion, implications, recommendations, and conclusions.

#### Summary of the Study

This study was conducted in one midwestern, suburban, public school district. The focus of the study was a group of high school students from this school district.

#### Purpose

The purpose of the study was to examine students' perceptions of their educational experiences and exit outcomes currently being proposed in the school district under study.

### Data Needs and Sources

To accomplish this purpose, data that defined properties and dimensions of students' perceptions about school were needed along with data that described students' opinions about exit outcomes being proposed in the school district under study.

The data sources were high school students and documents related to the development of the school district's exit outcomes. Students provided information about their experiences, reflecting upon what was positive and what they would like to have changed. The documents supplied the description of the development of exit outcomes in the school district.

### Data Collection

Data collection and data analysis occurred on an alternating basis so that analysis could help direct the data collection sampling procedures. Semi-structured, free response interviews served as the primary method of data collection in this study. A basic set of questions was used to provide consistency, but flexibility was also maintained to allow for deviation from the interview protocol when appropriate follow-up questions were needed. This study provided depth to responses leading to a wealth of information which would not have been discovered using other methods.

### Data Analysis and Interpretation

Open, axial, and selective coding were used to categorize and reconceptualize data. These procedures provided the avenue through



which the grounded theory was built from data collected. This method of analysis and interpretation required maintenance of a balance among the attributes of creativity, rigor, persistence, and theoretical sensitivity. A conditional matrix was the analytical framework used to pull all of the analysis together in the form of a grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Open Coding. The two main categories which emerged from interviews were reflections on educational experiences and perspectives on learner outcomes. The properties and dimensions of these two categories and their subcategories were systematically developed forming the basis for subsequently forming relationships between categories and subcategories.

Axial Coding. Axial coding involved putting data together in new ways by making connections between categories and subcategories using a coding paradigm (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The core category was identified as students' perceptions of school based on their school experiences in classrooms and extra-curricular activities. Characteristics of teachers and students affected the degree to which teachers' methods corresponded with students' needs, desires, and interests. Emergent themes were explored against additional data to establish their validity, and students' reactions to the proposed outcomes were further examined. By linking categories at the dimensional level, the primary message from students was identified as their desire for a personally relevant education for all students.

Selective Coding. Selective coding involved the integration of data by formulating a conceptualized story line (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The following story line emerged: To receive a personally relevant education, students expressed a desire to have routine opportunities for input, meaningful school experiences, and organized social development.

Conditional Matrix. Once the coding process was complete, the conditional matrix was used as an analytical diagram which depicted various levels of conditions and consequences related to the phenomenon through their impact upon action/interaction. This matrix was developed into a theoretical "Model of Personally Relevant Education" based upon students' perceptions of school outcomes described in this study.

#### Summary of the Findings

The initial categories used in the open coding process revealed that students felt prepared in most academic areas, with the exception of science. They did report that some subjects or skills lacked value for them, depending upon the content and instructional methods used by the teachers. In the area of social preparation, most of the students did not feel adequately prepared because this was not really taught or emphasized at school.

When considering the perspectives on learner outcomes, students did not refute any of the outcomes. They were especially in favor of learning to become a collaborative worker and an independent achiever. They also wanted to learn about being a

responsible citizen and a quality producer, but they suggested that learning about being a community contributor and an environmental protector be included as electives.

Through the coding processes, categories were identified and linked together in new ways. Regardless of students' different experiences, the overall finding was the same--they wanted to have a personally relevant education provided for all students. To achieve this, students felt it was necessary to have routine opportunities for student input, meaningful school experiences, and organized social development. The conditional matrix portrays these findings.

Routine Opportunities For Student Input. Students did not just want the problems they personally perceived in education to be adapted to their own needs; they wanted solutions to their problems to be flexible enough to fit the needs of all students. They also wanted to be involved in educational decisions which would affect them including those related to course requirements, extra-curricular activities, and classroom assignments.

Routine input from students would allow for unresolved issues to be discovered and addressed appropriately. If problems arose at school, student input could be a regular avenue to get them solved. Students suggested that having more choices related to their educational experiences would help improve their attitude and motivation associated with school.

Meaningful School Experiences. Students in this study reported that various subjects were not seen as having much value. The

content areas mentioned most frequently were those for which students could not see any future use for themselves personally. Most of them said if they thought about how the skill could be used in some type of a job or in their personal life later on, and no use could be created on their own, then they were not motivated to learn. For this reason, students communicated a strong need to know why they were learning what was being presented in their classes and how it could be applied in a context away from school.

Students suggested ways that content areas could be made more meaningful, such as studying history in terms of its relationship to current events instead of just memorizing names, dates, and facts. They preferred to learn using instructional methods other than reading out of textbooks, listening to lectures, or doing worksheets. Students wanted to be actively involved in challenging activities which taught them how to deal with life issues. They wanted all students to be able to have the advantages of receiving the "good stuff" usually only available in the honors or AP classes.

Organized Social Development. Students also wanted to increase their social development through various classroom experiences because they viewed social skills as very important to their success in college and the workforce. They wanted the classrooms to operate more like extra-curricular activities so students would have more opportunities for interaction with each other, even if they were not very active in clubs or sports.

Students claimed that if they had more opportunities to learn in groups and work on group projects, they would be able to develop

cooperative group skills and interact with all types of students. They believed it would also allow students to learn more by explaining what they have been learning to each other which could enhance their understanding of concepts.

### Discussion

This study was conducted primarily to investigate students' perceptions of school. Data were gathered using qualitative methodology and analyzed through several processes of inductive thinking and questioning. From students' responses, issues developed which remained unresolved for most students. Within students' responses, various solutions were suggested which were similar to the ways in which components of OBE attempt to address current educational issues.

### Method

From my experiences in this study, the qualitative methodology of grounded theory seems to be a viable research method. This process provides a vehicle for looking at relationships to find out what is occurring and an approach from which more general findings can be discovered than could be using alternative methods.

I was worried that students' responses might not yield meaningful data. However, during data collection, even when specific questions had not been asked related to the identified categories, themes emerged from students' answers to general inquiries which provided valuable information. The students

responded candidly, even when it reflected negatively upon themselves personally. Also, I had great respect for students' responses because of the depth of their reflective and thought-provoking opinions.

The findings from this study were consistent across all students. There were no differences related to gender, academic achievement level, or socio-economic status and students had not been given the opportunity to confer with one another because all interviews were done individually. Despite the diversity among the students, they all said basically the same thing.

### Issues

Traditionally, curriculum, instruction, and assessment have been viewed as primarily academic, but students expressed a need for an increase in the emphasis on developing their social skills. In the past, the social aspect of school has not been directly addressed but has remained within the "hidden curriculum." According to students, schools must find a way to meet the social needs of students. This could include expanding the opportunities for all students to participate in a variety of both classroom and extra-curricular activities which are compatible with their individual needs and interests.

Within every classroom, a range of individual needs and interests exists. The wider the range, the more diversified the curriculum, instruction, and assessment would have to be for the individual needs and interests of all students to be adequately met.

Traditionally, teachers have not planned different lessons for each one of their students to fit their individual needs and interests with the result that frustration, boredom, and an inability to learn at the pace established by the teachers have been just a few of the problems which existed.

Without a strong support system from home, students felt helpless to solve problems which they encountered during their school experiences. When faced with this situation repeatedly, some students chose to rebel and the literature on dropouts reports a feeling of helplessness as one of the major factors leading to dropping out (Fine, 1991). Students suggested that schools need to provide an avenue to follow when this occurs so they can work with, instead of against, school officials to solve problems.

People who claim that students do not know enough to be involved in educational improvements may want to rethink that belief. The findings of the study have shown that students can be mature, reflective consumers who can come up with highly appropriate recommendations for improvements in the field of education. Students can recognize inequity, lack of opportunities, and poor instruction.

Students deserve to be a partner with educators, parents, legislators, and the public to contribute their thoughts and desires into the process of making educational improvements. Those who are experiencing the education can be most appropriate sources of information for all types of educational decisions which would

include being involved in the process of developing the exit outcomes for their school district.

### Outcomes

Instead of traditional Carnegie unit courses, OBE curriculum integrates content and should be designed so students concentrate on learning outcomes which they have not already mastered. Instruction would be highly interactive with open-ended assignments allowing for different learning styles and a great deal of student input. Formative and summative assessment would be used to provide frequent feedback and accommodate different rates and styles of learning.

Students would not be compared to one another, so all students would have the opportunity to be enrolled in advanced courses once they have met the prerequisite outcomes. This would not mean that certain courses would have to be completed first, but it could be done by taking a pretest, showing competency through the completion of an independent study, or through other comparable avenues.

The design of OBE teaching units would include a determination of the most effective and relevant activities, instead of just continuously moving through a textbook using the lecture method. Real-life issues lie at the core of each unit surrounded by a wide variety of activities which includes flexibility and opportunities for student input. The establishment of meaningful life-long learning skills would take place as a part of the proposed exit outcome of learning to be an independent achiever.



A cooperative relationship between students and teachers would be developed so a strong support system from the home would not be absolutely necessary. Students would be given more than one opportunity to master each outcome and they would constantly be asked to contribute their ideas. Students would continuously evaluate their own progress and set goals for improvement in the future. If problems arose, students would be able to solve them by using democratic processes which would have been taught as a part of the proposed exit outcome of learning to be a responsible citizen.

Strategies of cooperative learning have been identified as essential to the OBE philosophy. These interactive methods would create an increase in the amount of social interaction between the students with many opportunities to work on group projects resembling the workplace. Effective leadership and group skills would be a part of the proposed exit outcome of learning to be a collaborative worker.

Students would have multiple opportunities to interact with a variety of people leading to the mastery of the process of building relationships. Learning how to establish and maintain fulfilling and supportive relationships with the family and society would be a part of the proposed exit outcome of learning to be a community contributor.

At the time of graduation, all exit outcomes should be mastered at least to the specified level, so students would not leave school feeling unprepared in any areas. The processes taught as a part of the proposed exit outcomes which focus on learning to be a

responsible citizen, a quality producer, and an environmental protector could address the three deficient areas of responsibility, organizational skills, and science mentioned by students in this study.

Instead of emphasizing courses, assignments, and grades, OBE focuses on a serious assessment of what students need for future success leading to outcomes of significance being the guide for the educational process. Task analysis of these outcomes would provide the specific skills needed and students would know in advance exactly what they would be expected to learn. Real-life application with integrated content would be emphasized in the demonstrations of mastery using authentic assessments.

#### Summary

This study used qualitative methodology to examine students' perceptions of school. Many of the issues which arose could be addressed by components of OBE. However, one key issue which students stressed is that of input, but it has not been emphasized as a component of OBE.

#### Implications

Students wanted to be provided with a personally relevant education which included more realistic and practical experiences linked to their own future needs. When considering the data gathered and the review of literature on the various topics related to this study, several implications could be noted regarding

educational goals and experiences, educational involvement, and OBE. These implications support current research. Some of the implications could be used as the basis for conducting further research.

#### Educational Goals and Experiences

Students viewed curriculum in astounding ways when reflecting upon educational experiences and learner outcomes. Students attempted to equate most of the interview questions with a particular subject at school rather than the actual learning they had experienced. Their picture of what they had encountered in the curriculum was divided into unrelated courses with a focus on completing assignments in each course to receive a grade. These data support the literature which suggested that evaluation methods have frequently been inconsistent with educational goals causing the focus to be placed on the grade instead of the learning (Tyler, 1949; Burton, 1983; Eisner, 1988; Spady, 1991). However, students' ideal definition of what they should be learning was even broader than just classroom experiences. They wanted the curriculum to include things, such as the social aspect, which implies that students may be defining curriculum more appropriately than some experts.

Students expressed a need for the opportunity to socialize with friends at school to become an organized part of classroom activities. They described the example of extra-curricular activities and how much they learned during these social

experiences. Students also wanted to have opportunities to build relationships with other students in an organized manner. These data support the literature which emphasized that learning is a social act and, through socializing with their peers, students can learn more than when they are instructed only by the teacher (Glasser, 1990; Leinhardt, 1992). This implies that organized social development needs to be emphasized during classroom experiences and an increase in the variety of extra-curricular activities is needed so everyone can participate.

Besides the broad area of social preparation, students mentioned three specific areas in which they felt the school should have prepared them better: responsibility, organizational skills (including note-taking and study skills), and science. These data support the literature which claims improvements in these areas are needed in order to achieve success in the future (Mullis & Jenkins, 1988; Anrig & Lapointe, 1989; Covey, 1989; Alderman, 1990). This implies that these areas need to be examined in order to determine what possible changes could be made to better prepare students.

Students communicated a desire to have opportunities for all of them to be able to participate in challenging activities in every class, instead of just the honors or AP classes. They also wanted all classes to be open to anyone who desired to work hard enough to take them, rather than limiting it to the "chosen few." These data support the literature which emphasized that educational methods of the past have left most students ill-prepared to meet the challenges of the future (Bloom, 1956; Spady, 1989b; Fiske, 1991; McCarthy,

1991; Labor Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, 1991). This implies that all students need to be taught to think, solve problems, and develop a life-long love of learning.

Instructional methods which include a heavy reliance on textbooks, worksheets, or the lecture method were viewed by students as ineffective. They preferred a variety of methods which actively involved them in the learning process with a focus on real-life issues. As a part of the instructional process, students also felt it was important to have a discussion about the significance of what they were learning and for teachers to incorporate strategies for classroom activities which are similar to those used outside of school. These data support the literature which emphasized that the instructional methods used by teacher implicitly teach many things which could be inconsistent with educational goals (Goodlad, 1984; Glasser, 1990; Marzano, 1992). This implies that instructional methods need to be selected carefully so they are consistent with educational goals.

Students communicated a need to interact with different types of students at school. They expressed a desire to have opportunities to learn in groups and work on group projects together. Advantages of working in groups included feeling more comfortable when learning something new and being able to help each other, especially when the teachers might not always be available. Students believed working in groups would be valuable not only to build relationships with a variety of students, but as a skill that would be extremely important to possess in the future when they

entered the workforce. These data support the literature which says that students' exposure to the multiple perspectives inherent in group work especially fosters analysis, synthesis, and evaluation; and also allows for a wide variety of learning styles and modalities (Davidson & O'Leary, 1990; Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 1990). This implies that working in groups should be an integral part of classroom instructional practices.

#### Educational Involvement

Certain areas of the curriculum were not seen by students as having much value. Students wanted connections to be made between what they were learning and how they personally could use it away from the classroom. These data support the literature which says that the curriculum should be examined from within the school by educators and students to be made more appropriate for each individual student (Dewey, 1916; Whitehead, 1929; Carroll, 1963; Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972; Reid, 1979; Goodlad, 1984; Sirotnik, 1987; Maeroff, 1988; McDaniel, 1992). This implies that the curriculum needs to be explored by educators and students to find ways in which it could be made more suitable for each student.

Students' opinions regarding being allowed opportunities for input were the same across all students. They all felt it was important to be able to express their thoughts on how educational experiences could be made more meaningful and to offer possible solutions when problems occurred. These data support the literature which says that students can see what is happening and intelligently

reflect upon their experiences to provide valuable information which could not otherwise be obtained (Jackson, 1968; Barth, 1980; Shepherd & Ragan, 1982; Weinstein, 1982; Schempp, 1983; Mayes, 1987). This implies that not only should teachers, administrators, parents, and the public have input into educational decisions, but students should also be included.

#### OBE

The findings of this study have shown that the proposed exit outcomes were not refuted, but students' and educators' perceptions differ somewhat. From their own current and timely experiences, students concluded many things. These data support the literature which says that educators can benefit from what the students have to add so students should be involved in making educational decisions of this kind (Jackson, 1968; Barth, 1980; Shepherd & Ragan, 1982; Weinstein, 1982; Schempp, 1983; Mayes, 1987). This implies that some important pieces could be missing without the inclusion of students' opinions in the process of developing outcomes.

#### Summary

Given what students say they want to gain from their educational experiences and the related literature, several implications can be made. The social aspect of education should become a major goal which is included in students' daily experiences. Instructional methods should incorporate frequent opportunities to work in groups and provide challenging activities

for all students. It can be implied that OBE is one way to address many of the concerns and desires of students, if provisions are made for their input into all aspects of making educational decisions, including outcome development.

#### Recommendations

This research has provided a model which theoretically depicts students' perceptions of what schools should do to make their education personally relevant. The findings of this study can affect further research, theory, and practice.

#### Research

This research has shown that students can see the ills and benefits of their educational experiences. The findings of this study should be used as a basis for further research which examines educational experiences in similar and different districts. Other grade level students need to be consulted about their views of school as well.

Additional research needs to be done on extra-curricular activities and the role that this area plays in the overall realm of curriculum. When conducting studies on curriculum, research needs to take into account all of the curriculum, not just academics. This means also looking into the social aspect which is currently not purposefully addressed. Research could also focus on different ways to meet the social needs of students.



### Theory

Theorists can use the findings from this research to confirm or contradict their own belief systems. The theoretical model developed as a part of this study provides a new approach which needs to be tested in different environments with different students.

Inquiry into the methods used to involve students in making decisions related to their education could broaden theory and improve the processes of learning.

### Practice

Educational practice should be informed by this study. The perceptions of students with respect to what educators should do to make their education personally relevant can be used to make decisions related to the areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Students must be involved in all aspects of their educational experiences. A collaborative relationship needs to be developed between teachers and students so they both feel comfortable allowing for this increase in student input. When problems arise, having students involved in finding a solution should increase the chances of improving the situation.

### Summary

Recommendations include further research being done in the same area using other districts and in the area of extra-curricular

activities. The theoretical model developed from this study needs to be tested in different environments with different students and can be used in practice to guide the educational decision-making processes.

### Conclusions

Specific changes in traditional educational ideology and methodology are necessary to improve future results. Students need to be involved in decisions about their educational experiences. The curriculum needs to be seen as more than coursework and classroom activities. Educators need to examine carefully the ways in which information is presented and the linkages made between school and life. The whole student needs to be considered and provided with options and different avenues to explore. Outcome-based education may provide solutions to problems described by the students in this study, if student involvement is added as a key component.

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**APPENDIXES**

APPENDIX A

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY INTERNAL REVIEW

BOARD APPROVAL

INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH BOARD  
FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS  
OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

Proposal Title: Dissertation - "Students' Perceptions of What Should  
Be Taught in School"

Principle Investigator: Adrienne Hyle/ Diane Welker

Date: 5-14-92 IRB # ED-92-057

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This application has been reviewed by the IRB and

Processed as: Exempt ☒ Expedite ☐ Full Board Review ☐

Renewal or Continuation ☐

Approval Status: Approved ☒

Disapproved ☐

Conditional ☐

Deferred ☐

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Comments, Modifications/Conditions for Approval or Reason for  
Disapproval:

Signature:

*Maria L. Tiller*  
Chair of University Board

Date: 5-18-92

APPENDIX B

LETTER TO PARENTS AND CONSENT FORM

ANN MILLERBORG  
PRINCIPAL

Putnam City Schools  
Wiley Post Elementary  
Office of the Principal  
6920 W. BRITTON ROAD  
Oklahoma City, Okla. 73132

405/72

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Your child is invited to take part in a research project which I am conducting as part of a doctoral program. Currently, I am the vice-principal of Wiley Post Elementary School in Putnam City, as well as working on my doctorate at Oklahoma State University.

Several seniors at Putnam City North have been selected to voluntarily participate in this project. The goal is to gain a wide variety of information from students representing all aspects of the school community. The principal, Kent Mathers, has given permission for this project to be conducted at the school, but the responses of the individual students will not be known by anyone other than myself.

Attached is a consent form which explains the purpose of the research and the procedure which will be used. If you want to give your child permission to participate, please sign and date the form. If you prefer for your child not to participate, please write that on the top of the form. If either case, please return the consent form to \_\_\_\_\_ at PC North by \_\_\_\_\_, so that the interview times can be arranged as soon as possible, or other students may be chosen.

Thank you very much for your time and possible consideration of participation in this project. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Diane Welker,  
Assistant Principal  
Doctoral Candidate



*Recognized by U.S. Department of Education as a School of Excellence.*

CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

As the parent/guardian of \_\_\_\_\_, I hereby authorize or direct Diane Welker to perform the following treatment or procedure:

Students will be individually interviewed for approximately 45 minutes at school. Questions will relate to their perceptions of what they have learned throughout their school career. Specifically, they will be asked to expand upon the areas in which they feel well prepared for the future and the areas in which they feel they should have been better prepared.

Personal interviews are being conducted instead of a written survey so that the students may create their own responses, instead of being forced into several prepared choices. The questions will ask for the students' opinions, but the students will also have the option not to answer any question. The interviews will be tape recorded for convenience, but all responses will be kept totally confidential by the researcher. The students' names will not be used in any of the published results and the individual students' responses will be known only by the researcher.

This is being done as part of an investigation entitled "Students' Perceptions of What Should Be Taught in School." The purpose of the procedure is to gather information which can be used to compare the students' perceptions with those of the education experts who plan the school's curriculum. The results will be beneficial because future educational planning can take into account the students' perspective, instead of just the adults' perspective of what students need to learn in school.

I understand that participation is voluntary, that there is no penalty for refusal to participate, and that I am free to withdraw my consent and participation in this project at any time without penalty after notifying the project director. I understand that there will be no cost to myself, or my child, associated with this project. I also understand that neither I, nor my child, will receive any monetary compensation for participation in this project.

I may contact Diane Welker at (405)721-8123 during the day, or (405)720-0300 during the evening or on weekends, should I wish further information about the research. I may also contact Terry Maciula, University Research Services, 001 Life Sciences East, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078, or at (405)744-5700.

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_ (a.m./p.m.)

Signed \_\_\_\_\_  
(Parent/Guardian's Signature) (Student's Signature)

I certify that I have personally explained all elements of this form to the student and his/her parent/guardian before requesting the signatures.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_  
(Project Director's Signature)



## APPENDIX C

### THE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

## INTERVIEW INFORMATION AND QUESTIONS

## Background Information:

1. Name and Address
2. Parents' Names  
Marital Status  
Father's Occupation  
Mother's Occupation
3. Ethnic Origin
4. Status in School  
Current Grade Point Average
5. Extra-Curricular Activities

## General Educational Information:

1. What do you plan to do in the future in the way of a career, additional school, and your personal life?
2. In what ways have your school experiences prepared you for the future?
3. In what specific areas do you feel best prepared? Why?
4. In what specific areas do you feel least prepared? Why?
5. What should you have been prepared for that you were not?

In what ways would you have benefitted from this?

How might this have been accomplished?

6. What do you think your parents would have wanted you to learn that you did not?  
  
Do you think it is important too?
7. What do you think your teachers would have wanted you to learn that you did not?

Do you think it is important too?

8. What were you prepared for that you don't quite know how it will be of benefit to you?

What did you learn because your parents or teachers wanted you to learn it, but you don't know if you ever will use it or why it was important to learn?

9. What did you learn that surprised you as being beneficial?

How can it be used that you had not considered until now?

10. What was easy to learn, but seems to be of no worth?

What was something that might have been fun to learn, but it really doesn't seem useful?

How might it have been made worthwhile?

#### Specific Desired Outcomes Information:

I will describe (and give examples of) some possible things that could be learned in school and I would like for you to describe how important you feel it is for schools to include each of these things in the curriculum:

1. Various methods of establishing and maintaining relationships with family, friends and society - What have you learned in school which will help you develop relationships in the future?

How will you learn about this if it has not been taught in school?

2. Different ways to participate in the democratic process to make positive changes which affect everyone - If you are going to vote on a Congressional candidate, if you just need to make a school-wide decision like the Student Council would make, or if there is a problem that needs to be solved by a group working on a class project, is it important to teach the democratic way to accomplish this?

3. Several techniques for using leadership skills and working in a group - Is it important to teach students how to be a leader in order to organize a group and get them working on accomplishing some group task or goal, and not just telling them everything to do, but providing time to listen to everyone's opinions?

Do you think it would be beneficial to have opportunities to work in groups on class projects?

4. Possible ways to preserve and improve the environment -Is it important to teach students things like how to prevent pollution, how to preserve natural resources, and how to minimize the damage to the environment?
5. Different methods for gathering and using information to set goals and adapt to changes - Is it important to teach the research skills needed to face a problem, gather the information, set goals to solve it, and find ways to adapt to needed changes?
6. Possible ways to maintain a high quality emphasis in pursuit of all achievements - Do you think it is important to teach students how to do their best, and expect them to do work over which is not their best?
7. Considering the things I have described, like working in groups, relationship skills, leadership skills, democratic process, research skills, and redoing work until it is high quality, do you think one of these should be concentrated on more than the others?

Validation Questions:

1. Do you usually know **why** you are learning about the things your teacher assigns? Do you discuss how it can be used in your life away from school when you are learning new things?
2. Do you see any value in studying about things which happened a long time ago in history?
3. Do you think it would be more meaningful to study what is happening now and try to relate it to history so we can use that information to help make better decisions today?
4. Would it be beneficial to have more opportunities to be able to select some of the things that you do in your classes, so that you could choose things which interest you rather than having everything assigned by the teacher?
5. How important do you feel extra-curricular activities are to your school experience? Do extra-curricular activities help you to learn things or have a more positive attitude about school?

## APPENDIX D

### SAMPLE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Excerpts from interview with "Adam"

In your school experiences, what should you have been prepared for that you were not? "In junior high school, they kept on us about getting involved when you get to high school, because that's the one thing that will make you have so much fun, help you to meet friends, and help to make your high school years better. They kept telling us this over and over, but it never really kicked in with me. It was my sister who really drove that point home and I don't know if there is some way they could give us a visual, some way show us what these clubs do when you are at the junior high level, or let us participate in one event with them." In what ways would you have benefitted from this? "You have to make the decision if you are going to run for office or something like that right after your freshman year at (the junior high). You can't wait until you get to (the high school) and go through a year and say, 'Oh that is kind of neat, I wish I would have done that,' because by that time it is too late."

How might this have been accomplished? "If there is anyway they could help you understand the importance of clubs at (the high school), it would be good, because that's really what makes your life there more fun."

What are the main benefits from being in high school clubs? "For me it was learning responsibility which I mentioned before and also just meeting people. The more friends you have the more fun you have and the more memories you will have. The people that I saw that did well in school were the ones who were really involved, because you are there more, you have more respect for what the school has to offer to you and you have more fun in your classes as well as in the clubs."

What was easy to learn, but seems to be of no worth? What was something that might have been fun to learn, but it really doesn't seem useful? "That's kind of a difficult question, but I would have to say history. I know that we need to be a well rounded person who knows some things about our country and the world when you graduate. But, I took World History this year even though I was supposed to take it as a sophomore, but this was the only time I had a chance to take it. It seems like we really didn't go that much in depth because you're trying to cover world history in one year, but I just don't see how it's going to be that useful to me. I know it's just kind of good things to know for trivia reasons, but I just don't see how it's going to be that useful to me, unless I go into some kind of history field."

Do you think that there is any way it could have been made more worthwhile? "Maybe if the class was taught differently in that the teacher could relate more to how the world is today and try to teach a lesson about what not to do today if you come to this point in

your life. You see what Napoleon did here and that's how he failed. If you're ever in a position like that, even on a different level, don't make that decision. Do this and relate it to modern day events. It's funny because in my junior year, I took American History and the teacher was one of the best teachers at (the high school). She started out the year having us read the paper for the first fifteen minutes of class we would have a discussion about current events and we would even have current events tests just to make sure people were listening and paying attention. After about the first nine weeks, we had to stop because we just weren't getting the American history learned. We would talk the whole hour about what was going on because that was during the Persian Gulf War, and we would spend the whole hour and not get our work done. I really enjoyed that, because before that I had not really ever read the paper except for the comics and Calvin & Hobbs, but other than that I had never really read the paper. It got me really interested in current events and I think that is what history is really about."

How important do you feel it is for schools to teach different ways to participate in the democratic process to make positive changes which affect everyone? For instance, if you are going to vote on a Congressional candidate, if you just need to make a school-wide decision like the Student Council would make or if there is a problem that needs to be solved by a group working on a class project, is it important to teach the democratic way to accomplish this? "We didn't really have much of this. Even now I don't think I really understand politics and the democracy that is used in our nation. I think that would be beneficial because I know voting percentages are really low. I can't quote any figures, but I just know that my history teacher has really gripped at us about getting our license to vote as soon as we turn 18. If people know more about it then they would be more likely to vote and more apt to be involved with it. Like this is what your representatives do, this is why they do it and they are doing it to try to please their constituents. Then the people know they are trying to do it for the nation's good and then they'll have more of an opinion and more of a reason to go vote."

How important do you feel it is for school to teach several techniques for using leadership skills and working in a group? Is it important to teach students how to be a leader in order to organize a group and get them working on accomplishing some group task or goal, and not just telling them everything to do, but providing time to listen to everyone's opinions? "People are all different and it's funny because we would have history projects to do where there were four people assigned to a group and you could look at the four people and say, 'Okay, that's the guy that's probably in charge of it, that's the guy that will probably do the outline,' and you could easily tell just from their personalities. I think it's difficult to teach a follower to lead and probably even more difficult to teach a leader to follow. If that is something that you're able to teach them then that is a skill they need to

learn, but I just don't know if you can really do it and be successful."

Did you think that it was beneficial to have opportunities to work in groups on class projects? "Yes, but it was hard for me because I'm kind of a leader and I like to take charge. If I could have, I would have taken the project and done the whole thing myself because I trust myself more than I trust those other three people. But there was one group that I was in where there was another person who was just as headstrong as I was and she ended up taking charge. I ended up having to be a follower and it was something I needed to learn because I just didn't know how to do it. I kept trying to challenge her authority, but it seemed to work out. I'm not sure how, but it did. I ended up doing kind of a role for the group instead of being the leader. It's funny because no one taught us how to do that. No teacher said who would be the leader and who wouldn't be. It just sort of worked out that way. I think just this chance to work in groups is what needs to be given and you can't really say who the leader will be. I think it would be beneficial to just work in these groups because I have so many problems working in groups and I have never really done it until this one class this year. In life, like out in the business world, everything now is on such a large scale level that you have to work in groups to get all the work done. It's a skill that I really haven't learned that well, and it should be taught, especially with the way the world is proceeding now whether it's the independent business man or a large corporation."

How important is it for schools to teach possible ways to preserve and improve the environment? For instance, is it important to teach students things like how to prevent pollution, how to preserve natural resources, and how to minimize the damage to the environment? "There's an environmental class at (the high school) and that's the only class I know of that would teach anything like that. Most of the things I know about the environment, I have learned outside of class on my own, like reading the newspaper. There's been a focus on it just recently in the last couple of years. I still don't really know a lot of things about it. I know there are things I could be doing to protect the environment and I'm sure a class like this would be helpful, because there needs to be something taught about this. Like in my family, we save newspapers, we crush our cans, and we don't pollute. But beyond that we are not in any environmental groups or anything like that."

How important do you think it is for schools to teach different methods for gathering and using information to set goals and adapt to changes? Is it important to teach the research skills needed to face a problem, gather the information, set goals to solve it, and find ways to adapt to needed changes? "Research techniques is one thing our English teacher taught us this year. On our final paper, we were supposed to get our research from three different areas and one was the library. Another was personal interviews which I think



is something good because more and more we need to learn to interview people. I've never interviewed anyone before and the first person I interviewed told me, 'Look, you're leading me to answer the question the way you want me to answer it.' So, learning to interview someone is an important part of doing research and then the third area was common knowledge. The issues we wrote about were areas we already had some knowledge of, so he said we could include that. Libraries are always used, but personal interviews were really helpful to me. Really those three ways are the only ways I know of to obtain information."

How important do you think it is for schools to teach possible ways to maintain a high quality emphasis in pursuit of all achievements? Do you think it is important to teach students how to do their best and expect them to do work over which is not their best? "In school I find that they don't really emphasize doing your best. I have gotten that from my home. My mom looks at the papers I bring home and if I have gotten a 98 and she looks at it and sees a misspelled word, she will say, 'You should have spelled this correctly, so you would have gotten a 100.'" I bring home straight A's, with a 99 in one class and a 94 in another class and my mom wants to know why that grade was so low. Even though a 94 is an A and it looks the same as a 99 on a report card because they are both A's, my mom is concerned with if I did my best work. It could come down to the end of the nine weeks and I could have a pretty high average with a big cushion and one more major assignment to do. I would tell my mom that I didn't really have to do that well on it because I already had a high average in that class, but she would want me to stay up later to do it better. She would tell me to do things like spell check it two more times and read it over again to make sure it flows well. Whether I needed a good grade on it or not, she would push me to do my best, so that I get from home. I know a lot of people who don't get that from home, so if there were some way it could be put into the schools, it would help a lot. So many kids don't get the kind of support that I do."

Excerpts from interview with "Beth"

What do you plan to do in the future in the way of a career, additional school, and your personal life? "I'm going to attend OSU Tech and I think I'm going to major in political science. I kind of would like to work for a major newspaper like the New York Times and just write about current political events."

In what ways have your school experiences prepared you for the future? "Going to school gave me the desire to go to college and want more than just being a housewife and mother. It made me want to get more education."

In what specific areas do you feel best prepared? Why? "English and pretty prepared in government classes, I guess because I like those the best."

In what specific areas do you feel least prepared? Why? "Math, because I had a learning disability and I had to be in lab growing up. The last year I was in lab was my sophomore year. I was in Algebra I and I passed the first semester, but I flunked the second semester. I'm just not very good in math and it has taken me longer to get it."

What should you have been prepared for that you were not? In what ways would you have benefitted from this? "I think high school classes should be more like college, because I know college is going to be totally different. In high school I was kind of babied and kind of not."

How might this have been accomplished? "I think they should have taught more practical stuff, like I don't see how diagramming a sentence and finding the prepositions and direct objects is going to be important in my life."

What do you think your parents would have wanted you to learn that you did not? Do you think it is important too? "They really wished I could have taken a class to learn how to be organized, like organizing my time and learning how to take notes right. I used to just write down what the teacher would say, but I know I can't just do that in college."

What did you learn that surprised you as being beneficial? How can it be used that you had not considered until now? "Literature, because I can talk with my friends who have had honors classes and I am surprised that I have read more than they have. I have done it on my own, or in my Humanities class I read a lot about art history, so I was really glad that I took that class."

What was easy to learn, but seems to be of no worth? What was something that might have been fun to learn, but it really doesn't seem useful? "Math, like finding inequalities or finding the factored form of 32. I can't see how I will ever use any of this."

How important do you think it is for schools to teach different methods for gathering and using information to set goals and adapt to changes? Is it important to teach the research skills needed to face a problem, gather the information, set goals to solve it, and find ways to adapt to needed changes? "It seems like one of my strong points was being able to research, write reports, do graphs and compare things. In my English class, we would be given a topic like the abortion issue and we would have to write an essay on it. The teacher would tell us what kind of essay he wanted us to write. We would do research in the library on it first. Like in my government class, we did a mock supreme court trial and I was the anti-abortion person. I had to prepare a three-minute case on why abortion should be illegal. This was good because it was a real life kind of thing."

Do you usually know why you are learning about the things your teacher assigns? Do you discuss how it can be used in your life away from school when you are learning new things? "No, we never really discuss the benefit of learning anything in our classes. It has just always been an assignment, like a chapter in the book. I think it would help people be more motivated and it would help them understand it better."

Do you see any value in studying about things which happened a long time ago in history? "Yes, the stuff that happened a long time ago can be studied and if people have to make a decision about today, what's going on now, then that could help them. In school we really just studied what happened a long time ago and we never considered how it was related to today. I just think this would make it more meaningful and interesting instead of just having assignments. Like the cure to AIDS and cancer, I think lie in all the old civilizations of the past. If we got more archeological teams out looking for the civilizations that we haven't even begun to discover. If we did, then maybe those answers and cures would be applicable to today."

Would it be beneficial to have more opportunities to be able to select some of the things that you do in your classes, so that you could choose things which interest you rather than having everything assigned by the teacher? "I think there is more choice needed. If I ever became a teacher I think the first thing I would have my students do is to write down on a piece of paper what they want to learn. They are the ones who are going to be learning it and I couldn't make them do it. They have to be interested in it, so they can have the discipline to do it. I think it needs to be more of a

democracy where the students have more of a say into what happens. They need to ask the students what they think, what they want to learn, and how things could be better. This goes along with how I think honors classes are discrimination. If you say this student is going in to honors classes and you are not, then you are saying one is not good enough. Maybe you can't do the school work, but you should be able to have the same opportunities. I mean sometimes I didn't really try, but I think you just learn the same thing in basic, regular, and honors classes, but they just go at different speeds. Maybe it makes a difference when you are applying for Harvard or Yale, but you should have a choice to be able to take whatever class you want. They shouldn't be the ones who decide, because they don't know the person. Maybe they are just not trying and if they were in the honors classes, they would be more interested and try harder. I mean I am kind of torn between well what if they topple over when they get into the class. I think if you choose to be there, you should stay for the rest of the year, but it is hard to know what it will be like ahead of time."

Excerpts from interview with "Clint"

What do you plan to do in the future in the way of a career, additional school, and your personal life? "I plan on going with my uncle into the Navy and then from there going on to college."

What do you think your teachers would have wanted you to learn that you did not? Do you think it is important too? "Nothing because they haven't really gotten to know me very well."

How important do you feel it is for schools to teach various methods of establishing and maintaining relationships with family, friends and society? What have you learned in school which will help you develop relationships in the future? How will you learn about this if it has not been taught in school? "I think it should be done in school, because they should teach the basic things everyone needs to know, like the [dropout prevention] program does. They need to have things which are more training for students that you can really use."

How important do you feel it is for schools to teach different ways to participate in the democratic process to make positive changes which affect everyone? If you are going to vote on a Congressional candidate, if you just need to make a school-wide decision like the Student Council would make, or if there is a problem that needs to be solved by a group working on a class project, is it important to teach the democratic way to accomplish this? "Yeah, they have government, but I think this is good for the students because they might use it if they get into an accident and the police don't do something right. I think the people who are running for an office should give all their secrets, like on TV, so the people who are voting will know what they are voting for."

How important do you think it is for schools to teach several techniques for using leadership skills and working in a group? Is it important to teach students how to be a leader in order to organize a group and get them working on accomplishing some group task or goal, and not just telling them everything to do, but providing time to listen to everyone's opinions? "When I was little I got to be the leader more, but now there are more people in my classes and the smarter ones always get to be the leader."

Do you think it would be beneficial to have opportunities to work in groups on class projects? "Yes, but sometimes it's not fair if you never get to be the leader of the group. Some teachers used to know me very well and they would pick me the very first time because I might be their favorite in the class, but the ones now don't know me very well, so they don't pick me. I think everyone should have an opportunity to be the leader."

How important do you feel it is for schools to teach possible ways to maintain a high quality emphasis in pursuit of all achievements? Do you think it is important to teach students how to do their best and expect them to do work over which is not their best? "Yeah, because whoever guesses on the answers might not really know it and the next level they go to they won't be able to do it right. I have been able to do my work over in my science class. He would explain it again and then give us a different assignment to do and not count the other one. This helped us to get good grades."

Do you think it would be more meaningful to study what is happening now and try to relate it to history so we can use that information to help make better decisions today? "Some of the people, like in the Congress, have new ideas and they try to compare them with the old ones, and they can put that together. Then we would have something new to explain to them that would be better than just memorizing stuff from a long time ago."

Would it be beneficial to have more opportunities to be able to select some of the things that you do in your classes, so that you could choose things which interest you rather than having everything assigned by the teacher? "No, because I think the teachers know what we should do better than we know it. They know what is best like if they are going to give us a test than they know what we should do and I wouldn't know what to pick so I would know how to do the test."

How important do you feel extra-curricular activities are to your school experience? Do extra-curricular activities help you to learn things or have a more positive attitude about school? "Yeah, because sports helps your mind when you don't make your grades, you don't play. Then it helps make your mind up whether to play and mostly all of them want to play so they try harder and harder."

APPENDIX E

DISTRICT EXIT OUTCOMES

Students will demonstrate that they are:

1. **COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTORS**

who establish and maintain fulfilling and supportive relationships within the family and society.

2. **RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS**

who participate in the democratic process and make changes which impact their communities, their country and the world.

3. **COLLABORATIVE WORKERS**

who use effective leadership and group skills to set priorities and work toward common goals.

4. **ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTORS**

who preserve and improve their environment.

5. **INDEPENDENT ACHIEVERS**

who use an ever-widening knowledge base to set goals and adapt to the demands of their changing world.

6. **QUALITY PRODUCERS**

who create products and provide services which reflect high personal standards of achievement.



VITA

Diana Elaine Welker

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL: IS OUTCOME-BASED  
EDUCATION THE ANSWER?

Major Field: Educational Administration

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, October 16,  
1958, the daughter of Carl and Dorothy Rogers.

Education: Graduated from Casady High School, Oklahoma City,  
Oklahoma, in May, 1976; received Bachelor of Science  
degree in Elementary Education from Central State  
University, Edmond, Oklahoma, in May, 1981; received  
Master of Education degree in Educational Administration  
from Central State University in May, 1986; completed  
requirements for the Doctor of Education Degree at  
Oklahoma State University in May, 1993.

Professional Experience: Teacher, Wiley Post Elementary  
School, Putnam City Schools, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma,  
1981-89; Arts Coordinator, Putnam City Schools, Oklahoma  
City, Oklahoma, 1989-90; Assistant Principal, Wiley Post  
Elementary, Putnam City Schools, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma,  
1990 to present.