THOUGHTFUL PEDAGOGY IN THE

INNER CITY CLASSROOM

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Life is made not of atoms, but of stories. - Roger Shattuck

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

I began teaching with missionary zeal. At age 22, I was bright eyed, full of energy and information, and utterly unprepared for what awaited me in the classroom. My first job began in January after my December 1988 graduation. I traveled between two lower income schools on the southwest side of Oklahoma City.

I taught from 26 to 30 kindergartners in small unairconditioned rooms, one with windows that opened out over a highway, so we often chose to close the windows and endure the heat over the deafening noise. The class size stayed fairly constant although I had taught more than sixty children, per school, in that 5 month period due to the transience of the population. Families would move in to apartments with the first month rent free, and stay until they were evicted, then move into another apartment. On one occasion, a nineteen-year-old mom came to see me in tears because her electricity had been shut off. She and her two young children had to stay across town with a relative and they didn't have transportation to get her child to school. I went to the school secretary because I was pretty sure that there were agencies that would pay electric bills for needy people in the winter. The secretary replied nastily, "That momma doesn't need to get her heat turned on, that momma needs to stop havin' babies." I turned away speechless, I was totally unprepared for the level of coldness I found in so many people working with this desperately needy population.

Many young parents saw me as an authority figure, as a representative of the school. They expected me to diagnose and recommend cures for everything from head lice to scabies. Many of the children witnessed daily violence and drug use. The school only provided one counselor one-half day each week, so the classroom teacher was, of necessity, counselor, teacher, and often parent to all of the children. Through the years, as I taught in various urban settings, I experienced things most people in my home town will never see. A five-year-old told me how to use a crack pipe, then drew illustrations. I guess she thought I needed the information. At my most recent school, the children would greet me Monday mornings with stories of who was shot over the weekend. A number of my earliest students have been murdered or are now in prison for murder.

And so I began my career, the bright future I had always dreamed of, by crying every afternoon. Then one day I realized that it was not within my power to make these children's lives okay. I could, however, take responsibility for making each day they had with me safe and happy. I could create in my classroom a place where children could feel capable and loved, where they would not go hungry, or be ignored. I also, eventually came to realize that most parents are doing the best that they can, and blaming poverty on the poor doesn't help. It sounds very simple, but many teachers are too caught up in the state requirements, or are at a stage in their personal development where they cannot provide for children's psychological and physical safety in their classrooms. I hope to share ways that teachers of all children can make a difference in their students' lives. The Schwienhart and Weikert (1988, 1993) preschool studies and Bruce Perry's (1997) brain research show how critical nurturing and decision making in the early years are critical for optimal development of children, and have a profound impact on the adults

they will become.

The Research Problem

The problem is that teachers are not prepared to help children in socially toxic environments, such as inner city schools, become resilient and able to cope with daily life. Teaching young children in urban schools is fundamentally different (Gallegos, 1995, Stallings, 1991, Habermas, 1991, 1995, Kanpol, 1990, and Schwartz, 1996) than teaching the same grade level in suburban or rural schools, yet, universities have a single training program for early childhood educators, despite their professional destinations. According to Olmedo (1997) many urban schools hire first year teachers who are often young, white, middle class, and under trained and unprepared for the daily traumatic events that make up life in an inner city school. Children in inner city schools bring with them all of the trappings of their lives outside of school. For many of these children, school may be the only place where they know that they will be safe and fed. Children often walk past gunfire, drug deals, and family fights on their way to school. When they arrive at school, they sometimes find a sterile traditional institution whose "teacher proof" curriculum not only ignores the teachers' talents and creativity, but also ignores the students' humanity. Young children are taught that if they cannot put the arbitrarily determined correct answer in the pre-drawn blank, they are labeled "at risk" for school failure. The self-fulfilling prophecy too often comes true.

In sharp contrast to this bleak picture, some teachers see their role as more than just teaching academic skills. They see children as whole persons in need of acceptance and psychological safety. Some teachers see their role as providing children with tools to

handle the extreme stressors in their lives. Most teachers are capable of pity, and some of empathy, but many have been trained to impart academic skills into empty vessels or blank slates, not to provide skills for developing resiliency in young children. Teacher training programs do not prepare teachers for the child who shows up at school a few hours after she had watched her mother die of a gunshot to the head. Teachers are not prepared to deal with the "discipline problems" of children born addicted to crack cocaine and are surprised that these children have trouble sitting still and quiet. The teachers who foster resiliency know that they may not change the future, but they will do whatever they can to change the current moment. These teachers will make sure that the children entrusted to their care know that they are safe and loved in their classroom, and that their teachers will help them to survive the world outside.

Why is this important? Why should I care? Bruce Perry's (1997) research on brain development conveys the urgency of reaching children during a window of opportunity in their brain development. Shore (1997) has found that although learning continues throughout life, there are "prime times" for optimal development where the brain is particularly efficient at certain types of learning. However, this also means that negative experiences, or the absence of appropriate stimulation are more likely to have serious and sustained effects. Perry has found that through brain imaging techniques we can actually see that the electrical impulses inside the brains of children living with daily trauma, have become "hard-wired" to the brain stem, instead of accessing problem solving cortex of the brain when faced with a perceived threat. They are literally stuck in the freeze state that precedes decisions of fight or flight and they cannot reason what to do so they just react without reasoning. Oehlberg (1996) said the struggle to merely

survive can limit brain development and greatly reduce children's ability to solve problems. Oehlberg found that the behavior of these children in group settings is often interpreted as belligerent or disrespectful, although they are usually not choosing to be disobedient. Perry has found that if children do not learn to access the cortex of their brains before this window of opportunity begins to close between the ages of eight and ten, their brain's development will be permanently altered. They will not be able to imagine a future or ways they can influence the outcome of threatening situations. According to Perry, chaos, neglect, and violence in early childhood negatively affect the organization and development of the brain. According to Garbarino (1991) after the home, schools have the most profound influence on children's identities. Oehlberg (1996) has found that growing up in a persistently threatening environment can interfere with the brain's development in young children, limiting their problem solving abilities, predispositioning them to violence and aggressive impulses, and limiting their capacity for empathy.

It can be argued that this is a job for counselors and therapists, however over 90% of all children will never see a therapist and most school counselors rarely have time to counsel any children. This leaves the classroom teachers on the front lines for positive intervention. According to Oehlberg, the opportunity to make a difference in children's lives has never been greater than it is today. She believes that teachers may be the most viable link between the children they teach and hope for their future. She believes that children have not changed, but childhood has changed. America has become a society where violence is glamorized and children often witness violence in their homes and neighborhoods. The angry, raging child is often very frightened and the excessive

vigilance of the traumatized child is often misinterpreted as hyperactivity or Attention Deficit Disorder. Fear destroys hope in some children but teachers can help break the cycle of violence by creating alternative outcomes through play, and help children regain a sense of control. Children are wonderfully receptive if teachers provide an opportunity for healing to occur, according to Oehlberg.

The Question

Primary Question:

What does it mean to teach for resiliency in an inner city classroom?

Secondary Questions:

(a) What can teachers do to foster resiliency in young children whose lives are immersed in violence?

(b) What can be done to prepare teachers for this stark reality?

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In conceptualizing the review of the literature for this study, I wanted to say that themes of race, poverty, and violence were interwoven in the urban teaching environment, but the metaphor of a neatly patterned fabric, requiring no further thought, seemed too simplistic and altogether tidy. I found a better metaphor in a set of three large dusty Seventies-era wall hangings that I noticed hanging in a dark stairwell in the school where I conducted the fourth interview for this study. According to the sign hanging between them, they were created by an artist-in-residence who had worked with the children of that school. The colors were muted, with some natural jute and some dyed strands. The ropes were rough and of various thicknesses which made the knots and weaves tug and pull against each other. The overall effect was richly textured and gritty, not patterned and neat, yet with consistency as a whole. The metaphor of this particular weaving appealed to me because, in conducting this review, I have found not a tidy set of causes and effects but a rather messy entanglement of ideas, separate view points, and overly simplistic solutions and apparent apathy of the general public.

Regarding the appearance of apathy, Henry David Thoreau (1889) said, "humans are not affected by mass disaster, but are deeply moved by the individual victims." I believe that news programs have certainly picked up on this human tendency by singling out individual faces and stories in the case of a large scale disaster. In the hundreds of metropolitan areas in this country, the statistics from Stand for Children, the Children's

Defense Fund, and other child advocacy groups have become meaningless to many people. For example, according to the Children's Defense Fund, "in 1998, 520,000 US children were in foster care, a 30 percent increase from 1990. . . . 88 percent of the states named substance abuse as one of the top two problems exhibited by families reported to child protective service agencies for maltreatment, poverty and economic status were the second. . . . In 1998, 5.4 million children lived in households headed by a relative other than a parent. Thirty-nine percent of these children - 2.13 million - lived in these households with no parent present " (1999).

In response to these and other staggering statistics, we blame the victims or believe that an underclass is necessary to define middle and upper classes. According to *New York Observer* columnist Anne Rophie, "All right, out there, someone is sleeping on a grate . . . Somewhere in the parts of town where white powders are served in contaminated needles . . . the emergency rooms are full of people," still she says, "Cruelty is as natural to the city as fresh air is to the country . . . maybe it's the fuel that powers the place . . . I like the wicked clink of glasses, the light bouncing off the rhinestone clasp . . . the chandeliers glinting against the dark . . . Cruelty is part of the energy, part of the delight . . . Nerve is what you need to get through . . . What you must decide is that the shame is bearable" (Kozol, 1995, p. 113,114).

In contrast to overt cynicism for the plight of the masses, individual true stories of children's lives filled with poverty and violence, told to us by real teachers such as Pat Conroy, Jonathan Kozol, and Louann Johnson are deeply moving for many people. This

is one reason I chose to seek out the voices of individual teachers rather than conduct a statistical study.

When reviewing literature related to this study, I found myself constantly chasing rabbits or getting off track and having to reorient myself to the question. The paradox I am faced with is that while all areas of an urban teaching environment can be separated - community violence, children's home environments, urban school culture including basic skills curriculum and testing-all are interrelated and constantly affect each other. In this review, I will attempt to distill the current thinking and to present what I believe to be the major influencing factors on inner city teaching while keeping in mind that each factor is not an individual, separable entity and are all affected by public and individual responses to them.

In this chapter I have identified several themes from the literature that affect urban early childhood education. I begin with societal trends including social toxicity, race, class, and urban decline, then move to individual children's moral development and brain research, then to teachers' responsibilities of pedagogical tact and fostering resiliency.

Social Toxicity and the Urban Environment

According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children's Position Statement on Violence in the Lives of Children (1994), the United States now leads the industrialized world in violent acts such as homicides, rapes, and assaults. "Children in America are growing up in a culture where violence is glamorized in entertainment and sports . . . What is different today is the combined effects of changes in

the family and community along with repeated exposure to real and fictional violent acts on the TV screen and in their living rooms" (Oehlberg, 1996, p. 7). Second to what is happening in their homes, schools have the greatest influence on children's identities (Garbarino, 1992).

Garbarino (1992) describes childhood being eroded by social toxicity. In the same way that chemical spills are most harmful to the smallest and weakest, so social toxicity, such as witnessing and experiencing violence, absent parents, poverty, racism, poor health, and drug addiction are most damaging to children. Each of these factors becomes more toxic as it combines with the others leaving our children the most vulnerable. He admonishes that we must put aside blaming parents and address the challenges of raising children in an environment that has already become socially toxic. Parents who are addicted to drugs or alcohol have primary relationships with substances, not their children. Early childhood educators can help by providing nonjudgmental acknowledgment of children's feelings and a safe environment with routine and firm boundaries, (Thompson, 1998).

Issues of Race, Class, and Urban Decline

"The whole discussion of desegregation is corrupted by the fact that we mixed up race and class" a Harvard sociologist is quoted by Kunen (1996, p.44). He further explains that there is no benefit derived by sitting in a desk next to a person with different skin color. Benefit is gained by moving from isolated poverty to a setting filled with "life

chances" opportunities and networks for economic mobility, to be put in touch with those who open doors to higher education and better careers.

However, race and class are intertwined and difficult to separate. "Children quickly learn to associate power and privilege with White people and poverty and subordinate status with people of color. Teachers and schools play a crucial role in the course of children's attitudinal development . . . As practicing teachers, we must constantly examine our own backgrounds and perspectives and be aware of how they influence our assumptions about society and about individual children and families. In particular, White teachers need to be aware of how their position of privilege limits their awareness and understanding of social stratification and discrimination and struggle to push off these constraints," (Ramsey, 1995).

As urban school districts' population of children of color rises, prospective teachers continue to be White and suburban. In 1992, 87% of the teachers in this country were White, according to the National Education Association. Most pre-service teachers express little desire to teach in a setting different from their own background and are apprehensive about their ability to teach such students (Olmedo, 1997).

In *Saving Children at Risk*, Norman Garmezy illustrates the cycle of poverty for disadvantaged children. Poverty leads to poor health, growth, and nutrition, which leads to elevated infant mortality, and elevated family size, malnutrition illness, and absence of medical care, along with social deprivation, and environmental inadequacy, all of which lead to increased risk of school failure. This leads to unemployment and underemployment, and the poverty cycle starts over (Thompson & Hupp, 1992). Karnes, Johnson, and Beauchamp offer a more concise interpretation of the multigenerational

cycle, "financial want creates difficulty meeting basic needs, which, in turn leads to emotional stress that further limits ability to meet basic needs" (1988, p.58).

In 1990 the number of biracial births, children with one Black parent and one White parent, reported was 620,000 and climbing. Dual heritage backgrounds are of special concern to teachers because out-of-home environments contribute significantly to children's formation of identity (Morrison & Rodgers, 1996). Our knowledge about their needs and how to meet their needs has not increased along with the growth in population because many professionals misunderstand biracial children and many interracial parents are confused about their children's identity (Wardle, 1990).

Families were once described as being "culturally deprived" or lacking due to culture. This way of thinking has since been refuted by studies showing that different cultural environments were, in fact different from the culture of white middle-class, but just as viable.

According to John Ogbu (1978) it is the response to the White culture by minority communities that influences the minority's success or failure. People's perceptions of future opportunities influence perceptions of and responses to schooling. Ogbu, an African anthropologist who studies race relations in America, has found that voluntary minorities, or minority groups who come to another country by choice and who differ more in language and culture from dominant groups, fare better in school and socially than do involuntary minorities. Involuntary minorities did not immigrate by choice, and may differ only slightly in language and culture such as Blacks in America, Maori in New Zealand, or Gypsies in Europe. Voluntary minorities attribute difficulties to tangibles such as language barriers, which they perceive as temporary, and can compare conditions

to those of their homeland, to which they may have an option of returning. Involuntary minorities do not perceive barriers as temporary and may not have a homeland to return to, as in the case of Native Americans. He also believes that in this country, barriers to education and higher paying jobs have proven over decades that they are not temporary, despite a collective struggle to remove the barriers. Therefore, minorities have developed responses to white culture and schooling that include, "*oppositional cultural frame,*" which involves a language that excludes the dominate culture, for example, hip hop and rap music and redefining words like "fat" and "bad" to mean "good". Of course, these terms and meanings must constantly change. Like teen-age slang, they are meant to define group membership and confuse outsiders. Another response is the development of *"folk theories"* for success, which may be in conflict with other survival strategies and may be perceived as "acting white" or assuming cultural identity of their oppressors by complying with school expectations. The third response is a *distrust of white people* that has been built by decades of unequal opportunity. Race relation discussion in this country often focus on the treatment of the minority by the dominant culture, but, according to Ogbu, it is the *responses* by minority populations that are the most significant in determining success than the programs instituted by the majority.

Another major factor influencing inner city schools is the lack of work in the neighborhoods. According to Wilson (1996), for the fist time this century, 50% of the adults in inner city neighborhoods are not working in a typical week. There have been cuts in Medicaid and Aid to Families with Dependent Children, in addition to many low-wage jobs that do not provide medical insurance. "The negative consequences are clear: where jobs are scarce, many people eventually lose their feeling of connectedness to work

in the formal economy; they no longer expect work to be a regular and regulating force in their lives . . . Work is not simply a way to make a living and support one's family. It also constitutes a framework of daily behavior . . . where you are going and when you will be there" (Wilson, 1996, p. 30).

In a discussion about politicians who expect the poor to "pull themselves up by their bootstraps" while ignoring complex realities of poverty, Jonathan Kozol (p. 162) says:

> So long as the most vulnerable people in our population are consigned to places the rest of us will always shun and flee and view with fear, I am afraid that educational denial, medical and economic devastation, and aesthetic degradation will be virtually inevitable; and this, I am afraid, will be the case no matter what the individual or even shared achievements of small numbers of good human beings who are infused with the essential heroism of the people whom I have described. So long as there are ghetto neighborhoods and ghetto hospitals and ghetto schools, I am convinced there will be ghetto desperation, ghetto violence, and ghetto fear because a ghetto is itself an evil and unnatural construction.

" Half of all people in the United States live in suburbs, one quarter in core cities, and one quarter in small towns and rural areas . . .Children under 6 are more likely to be poor than any other age group of Americans. . . In 1950, 40% of the poor were elderly and 10% were children; but in 1990, 40% of the poor were children and 10% were elderly." (Washington & Andrews, 1999, p.10).

"Obviously, most large cities have become the center of large concentrations of

people of color. Early in 1993, Jimmy Carter said 'now I think our society is as segregated as it was 30 years ago. But it's not on the basis of race anymore. Segregation today is between those who are rich and those who are poverty stricken'" (Kretovics & Nussel, 1994).

In a chapter of *School Children in the Urban Slum*, titled "I See the Mind of a Five Year Old As. . ." Sylvia Ashton-Warner writes, "It's not beauty to abruptly halt the growth of a young mind and overlay it with the frame of an imposed culture. The true conception of beauty is the shape of organic life and that is the very thing at stake in the transition from one culture to another"(1967).

Moral Development of Children

"The activity of teaching is a moral activity. It is never amoral. It can at times be, and sometimes is immoral . . . By focusing upon the teaching of moral and ethical values, the conversation fails to identify the moral and ethical problems created by the structure of schooling" (Huebner, 1990, p.267). Education has been discussed in scientific terms that attempt to distill this very human activity into terms of behavioral objectives and factory metaphors. Huebner continues, "When these restrictions are lifted, talk about teaching can also include talk about feelings. Hope and disappointment, joy and pain, love and anger, pride and guilt, and other feelings that accompany the activity of teaching need not be repressed. Feelings can be indicators that ethical quandaries are present and need to be brought to consciousness" (1990, p. 270).

When parents fail to provide moral examples for their children, it is up to the community, most notably schoolteachers, to set high moral standards. The failure to do so contributes heavily to the social toxicity of the environment. When children cannot rely on adults to make them feel safe, they will join gangs, adopt a nasty facade, and even carry guns to avoid being afraid all the time. It only takes a few gunshots a month, a few episodes of family violence to create a persistent atmosphere of fear (Garbarino, 1992).

"In order to cultivate a sociomoral atmosphere in which mutual respect is continually practiced," Rheta DeVries calls upon classroom teachers to, "relate to children in cooperative ways, promote peer friendship and cooperation, including conflict resolution, cultivate a feeling of community and the construction of collective values, appeal to children's interests and adapt to their purposes, and adapt to children's understanding (DeVries, 1997, p. 14). DeVries' study of children's interpersonal understanding indicated that children taught in constructivist programs with cooperative environments in which they are socially active and where the teacher encourages a sense of community are more adept at interpersonal understanding and negotiations than children in direct instruction programs where social interaction is discouraged. DeVries presents the possibility that heavily academic teacher centered programs may actually be harmful to children's cognitive and sociomoral development (1991).

Constance Kamii (1994) writes, "Most educators and most of the public today think that the hour for English is only for English, that the hour for math is only for math, and so on. They also view the drug problem, AIDS, teenage pregnancies, and violence as separate issues, to be dealt with apart from academic subjects. However, drug abuse, unsafe sex, and violence are all symptoms of heteronomy. . . .Children who can take

relevant factors into account do not take drugs or resort to violence to settle conflicts. In the classroom, students develop or are prevented from developing intellectually as well as socially and morally. And the intellectual and social/moral domains are inseparable. A classroom teacher cannot foster the development of autonomy in the intellectual realm while suppressing it in the social and moral realms" (Kamii, 1994, p. 677). Kamii lists the following three practices as indicators that teachers are aiming to develop autonomy: "Encouraging children to make decisions and enforce their own rules . . . .Fostering intrinsic motivation . . . Encouraging children to exchange viewpoints" (Kamii, 1994, p. 676).

Effects of Trauma on Brain Development

New brain development research has cast the light of public attention onto the importance of early childhood years in terms of good prenatal care, need for nurturing relationships, and positive, age appropriate stimulation from the time of birth. Although we are just beginning to understand the complexities of the growing brain, early childhood educators can take advantage of public interest to promote healthy development and learning for all children (Newberger, 1997).

"Growing up in a persistently threatening environment can interfere with the way a child's brain develops. This can result in a greater concentration of brain cell growth in the mid-brain at the expense of the cortex area, eventually limiting a child's ability to solve problems. It can also result in a predisposition to aggressive, impulsive behaviors and an underdeveloped capacity of empathy." Ohleberg (1996) further states that these

behaviors have traditionally been interpreted by parents and teachers as willful disobedience when, in fact, they may be a child's pleading for physical and emotional safety. The hyper-vigilance of a traumatized child is often misdiagnosed as Attention Deficit Disorder and the child's traumatic experiences may be overlooked. Struggling just to survive can limit brain development to "fight or flight" or the "freeze" state that precedes them. This frozen, powerless state greatly limits problem-solving abilities.

"For millions of American children, the world they encounter is relentlessly menacing and hostile. So, with astounding speed and efficiency their brains adapt and prepare for battle. Cells form trillions of new connections that create the chemical pathways of aggression. . . Researchers can now tell us with increasing certainty how the brain adapts physically to this threatening environment - how abuse, poverty, neglect, and sensory deprivation can reset the brain's chemistry in ways that make some genetically vulnerable children more prone to violence" (Kotulak, 1996). Kotulak, a Chicago reporter who won the Pulitzer prize for reporting on brain development in early childhood, reports on the findings of of Dr. Markus Kruesi which indicate that low levels of the chemical serotonin is the most accurate predictor of which children will commit violent crimes or suicide. Kotulak also documents Bruce Perry's work with the children from the Branch Davidian Cult in Waco, Texas. Perry found that the children had such high levels of noradrenaline, a chemical signature of PostTraumatic Stress (PTS), in their blood stream that their resting heart rate was 16 to 86 beats per minute faster than the average for children their age. PTS causes these children to be in a constant state of alarm. They have learned that a quick reaction may prevent victimization. They have adapted to a more aggressive, more impulsive state. Kotulek also cites the work of Mary

Schneider which has found that even fetuses have higher levels of noradreline when their mother experiences significant stress during pregnancy. Although there is more evidence in animal studies than humans, it appears that maternal stress during pregnancy leads to hyperactive and developmentally delayed children (1996).

Kotulak (1996) quotes Dr. Richard Gells' study that found severe violence toward children increased 71 per cent in single mother homes, as opposed to two-parent homes. Large groups of disadvantaged people are thrown together in public housing complexes, where the physical layout and social patterns can make parental supervision difficult, children are then exposed to violence on television, and have the most accessibility to handguns of any place in the world.

Kotulak also reports that brain damage from negative experiences increases the risk of aggression, asthma, language failure, depression, epilepsy, high blood pressure, immune-system dysfunction, and diabetes. "All of these problems are on the increase as the forces that generate stress - poverty, violence, sexual abuse, family breakup, neglect, drugs, lack of good stimulation, and too much of the wrong kind of stimulation -continue to escalate" (1996, p.37). Caring parents and teachers can counter-act these negative experiences and contribute to the resiliency of children. "Forty percent of U.S. families start out with one, two, or three strikes against them, said Nicholas Zill a Washington psychologist. One is lack of education, another is lack of commitment, parents are unmarried when they have their first child, and a third is lack of maturity, meaning that the mother is under twenty years old at the time of her first child's birth. One family in nine has all three strikes against them" (Kotulak, 1996, p.40). "If neurons are used, they become integrated into the circuitry of the brain by connecting to other neurons; if they

are not used, they may die. Stress and constant threats also rewire emotion circuits" (Begley, 1996).

Unfortunately, "Neither brain science nor education research has been able to free the majority of America's schools from their 19th century roots . . . 'We do more education research than anyone else in the world,' says Frank Velluno, a professor of educational psychology at State University of New York at Albany, 'and we ignore more as well'" (Hancock, 1996, p. 4).

"The brain is not a 'single system.' It is many interacting and interconnected systems organized in a specific hierarchy - with the most complex (cortex) on the top and the least complex (brain stem) on the bottom. Different parts of the brain-different "systems" in the brain - mediate different functions (e.g., the cortex mediates thinking, the brainstem/midbrain mediate state of arousal). . . . The brain stores information in a use-dependant fashion. The more a neurobiological system is 'activated' the more that state (and functions associated with that state) will be 'built' in - for example, practicing the piano, 'memorizing a poem,' or staying in a state of fear. . . .The brain remains sensitive (plastic) throughout life-but different parts of the brain are most plastic (cortex) and others are relatively implastic (brainstem). Experience can change the mature brain-but experience during the critical periods of early childhood *organizes* brain systems. Trauma during infancy and childhood, then, has the potential effect of influencing the permanent organization - and all future functional capabilities - of the child (Perry, 1997 p.290)."

Tact of Teaching and Pedagogical Thoughtfulness

"...A new pedagogy of the theory and practice of living with children must know how to stand in a relationship of thoughtfulness and openness to children and young people rather than being governed by traditional beliefs, discarded values, old rules, and fixed positions. The pedagogy of living with children is an ongoing project of renewal in a world that is constantly changing around us and that is being changed by us" (van Manen, 1991 p. 3). van Manen speaks of a world where even children surrounded by violence, poverty, drug abuse, prostitution, and alcoholism may still experience the hope of a better life. A teacher may be the only person in a child's life able to offer that hope, necessitating tactful action on the part of the teacher.

> Tactful action is thoughtful mindful, heedful. But it helps to make a distinction between thoughtfulness and tact. We should see that thoughtfulness and tact go hand in hand. They complement each other. Without thoughtfulness, there is no tact, and without tact, thoughtfulness is at best merely an internal state. Thoughtfulness is the product of self-reflective reflection on human experience. In a sense, tact is less a form of knowledge than it is a way of acting. It is the sensitive practice of heedfulness. Tact is the effect one has on another person, even if the tact consists, as it often does, of holding back, waiting (van Manen, 1991, p.127).

I often had difficulty as an inner city teacher with motivating children to do work that had little to do with their lives. Why would a hungry, scared kindergarten child care very much about identifying a lowercase "*a*"? Why would teachers expect them to care? Which brought me to the question, Who determines what should be taught in inner city classrooms? Madeleine Grummet, in an essay titled "Other People's Children" offers the following insights on the overt curriculum:

> Instead of extending the subtle, flexible responsive language that we have with our own children, curriculum devised by boards of regents, state education departments, superintendents, book publishers, even departmental committees, rarely rests on a thorough or even a casual acquaintance with the children for whom it is intended. They are other people's children and so it makes perfect sense that to guide our decisions, we shall rely on the rules we use to tell us how to treat people we don't know. "Other people's children" is a category that contains most of the children we don't know...(they) belong to other people, to single parents, urban poor, suburban scared, to the moral majority, the eastern establishment. They are the abstract community guided by ethics that are equally abstract. The rules fit the curriculum, but the curriculum does not fit anybody (1988, p.164).

In our haste to objectify students and learning into a scientific "teacher-proof" formula that can be replicated regardless of messy ideas such as interest, talent, and emotions, we have ignored the people, their idiosyncracies and their sense of wonder. We have wasted not only great potential for teaching and learning but have also bleached

out much of the joy. The intuitive side of life is missing from much of teacher preparation, according to van Manen, (1991).

Resiliency

According to Perry (1996), the term resiliency implies that things can return exactly to the way they were before trauma occurred. He suggests the use of the term "malleable" rather than "resilient" because for many children, life cannot be again as it was before the trauma. Childhood is often a dangerous time. Young children depend on the adults in their homes and communities to provide a safe, nurturing, and predictable environment. Unfortunately, few children are afforded this luxury. Those who do not experience or witness violence and neglect are bathed in televised violent images that create a pervasive view that the world is more violent than the world is in reality. Perry describes the beliefs and actions of children that mirror violence in homes and streets as the *vortex of violence.* Children living with violence and pervasive threat adapt their emotional, cognitive, social, and physiological functioning. Additionally, their home and street culture may accept and even prefer aggression as a solution to problems.

Bonnie Bernard found that although one in four children of alcoholics develops alcohol problems, three out of four do not. "In order to avoid falling into the pathology paradigm of 'blaming the victim' syndrome, with it's concomitant focus on 'fixing kids' our perspective is that personality and individual outcomes are the result of transactional process with one's environment. To be successful, prevention interventions must focus on enhancing and creating positive environmental contexts-families and schools and

communities that, in turn, reinforce positive behaviors," (1994. P.7). Bernard describes resilient children as those who have a sense of future and purpose. "Over one fourth of children living in the United States are living in poverty. Although most studies look at single risk factors, and many families are affected by multiple risks, a caring and supportive relationship is the most critical variable" (1994, p. 10). School can serve as a protective shield against uncertainty at home whether it stems from substance abuse, mental illness, neglect, or a combination of factors. Bernard quotes Nel Noddings as saying, "It is obvious that children will work harder at things, even odd things like adding fractions–for people they trust." Bernard documents the work of Felsman, Werner, Coleman, Tobler, and Bangert-Drowns, all of which articulates and reaffirms the importance of positive peer relations and social support as contributors to resiliency in children. In a more extreme viewpoint, Judith Rich Harris (1998) has created debate with her book, *The Nurture Assumption,* which asserts the influence of genetics and environment (peers and the parents of a child's peers) on children's personality development to the exclusion of parental influence.

"Resiliency can be fostered through mitigating risks and building resiliency." Six steps outlined by Henderson and Milstein include "Increase bonding, Set clear and consistent boundaries, Teach life skills, Provide caring and support, Set and communicate high expectations, Provide opportunities for meaningful participation" (1996, p. 12).

In her book, *Getting to Know City Kids: Understanding Their Thinking, Imagining, and Socializing*, Sally Middlebrooks takes a respectful look at urban children's world-making. She documents children's drawings, photos, and descriptions of the private worlds they create in parks, alleys, and under steps. Even when they are not

allowed to play outdoors for their own safety, they have created teepees and little houses in their bedrooms and in hallways. Middlebrooks wants educators to see beyond the deficit model thinking about inner city children as 'at-risk' and failing. She demonstrates their creativity, ingenuity, and complex thinking.

Oehlberg (1996) recalls receiving very little preparation as a teacher in responding to children who have never slept on a pillow of their own nor eaten a warm meal several nights in a row. She expected to teach children who would arrive at school feeling safe, full, and ready to learn. "The widely quoted adage 'It takes a whole village to raise a child' may sound like an overstatement, but it's true. Some problems we face as early childhood educators really are too big and too complex for us to solve individually. Studies of creative problem solving confirm that effective groups can accomplish more than any one of the talented individuals who compose them. In providing the best service to children, we are better off if we 'hold hands and stick together,'" write Mary Horn, Sheila Pluckenbaum, Blanka Banders, and Patty Burke (Tertell, Klein, and Jewett, 1998).

The bodies of literature reviewed here, social toxicity, the on-going struggle to come to terms with race relations, social class and urban joblessness, children's own moral development, brain research, teachers' tact, and children's resiliency present not only the complicating factors of inner city teaching, they also present the challenges and possible rewards.

The media are filled with stories and pictures of violence. What is overlooked in the soundbites of the news stories is the fact that these newsworthy events must be assimilated or accommodated into someone's normal life. There are teachers and classrooms involved with the families featured in every news story. There are kids like

my student Nicole, who go to school the next day after they have watched their parents get shot. There are kids like my student Jose' who come to school, and bring their younger brothers and sisters, because their parents have moved to another country and have left their children behind.

John Hope Franklin's 1997 speech to the North Carolina General assembly summarizes issues of race and class in urban schooling, "It is surely not good enough for the most powerful nation in the world to have an educational system that is impoverished not only in terms of its dilapidated physical facilities but also in terms of inequities along racial and class lines among schools and school districts. I hope that you will agree that it is not enough for us to move at a snail's pace in wiping out the remnants of racial and ethnic strife. In doing so, we merely ass to the burdens we must bear in leading the world to lasting peace, devoid of the sentiments and enmities that have already brought huge wars time and again. We can do better than that, and I hope you agree" (Washington & Andrews, 1999).

The work being done in the areas of brain research and resiliency in children emphasizes the importance of high quality early educational experiences as a pathway for children to develop and strengthen survival skills. Although the new brain research is just beginning, the exciting part for educators is that the preliminary results are supporting the things that thoughtful teachers have known about children for years. The medical affirmation is finally bringing national attention to the importance of nurture and trust in the first years of life.

The effects of traumatic events, when shown in live images of the brain's activity, are somehow more believable than an educator's intuitive sense that something is, "just

not right here." Federal prosecutors tried to tell Bruce Perry, a medical doctor and psychologist, that the children from the Branch Davidian cult were unaffected by their experiences. The prosecutors were not convinced that the children were in fact deeply effected, until Dr. Perry was able to "prove" the children's agitated state by having them wear wristwatch-type heart monitors which showed that their hearts were racing, even when they were sleeping (Oehlenberg, 1997, personal communication).

Through brain imaging we can actually see the electrical activity of the brain. We can see that kids who say that they can't imagine living to adulthood, really, physically cannot access the parts of their brain that allow them to imagine alternative endings of situations when they are asked to think of different endings to a story. There is hope, however, just by simply stopping in the middle of a story, and asking, "What do you think will happen next?" or "What would happen if . . .," teachers of young children can teach them how to solve such problems. If traumatized children are not taught that things can turn out differently and that they can have some power to effect their future, by the time they are eight years old it will be much more difficult for them to ever learn. Teachers may ask themselves, "What difference could I possible make?" The answer is, a lot!

A former principal and dear friend of mine used to say, "One bad teacher will not ruin a child, but one good teacher can save a child." I have observed that adage in action. Sometimes the classroom teacher, and the classroom atmosphere he or she creates, may be the only physical and concrete indication in a child entire life, that the world can be ordered, reasonable, and safe. Once a child sees the possibility of hope, the child can work toward goals of resilience. If a child cannot imagine his or her world as being any different, then they cannot achieve a difference for themselves.

Many adults point to the influence of a favorite teacher as being a significant factor in their choice to continue in school or choice of career, and may even attribute their success in life to a specific caring teacher who made them feel important and worthwhile.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

In the past, researchers have often focused on one specific issue and ignored the complex and contradictory nature of daily life (Bettis, 1996). The nature of this study, with its focus on the meaning of experiences, lends itself to a qualitative study because it seeks to discover the essence of what it means to be an inner city teacher. This study attempts to reveal multiple meanings and multiple subject positions by sharing the stories of respondents and their lived lives.

Personal experiences may not be generalizable, repeatable statistics. Meanings are context bound and truths are multiple. Statistics may tell us of the *probability* of what will happen in inner city classrooms, but they cannot reveal *possibility* of hope one teacher can bring.

van Manen (1990) writes, "The preferred method for natural science, since Galileo, has been detached observation, controlled experiment, and quantitative analysis... in contrast, the preferred method for human science involves description, interpretation, and self-reflective, or critical analysis. Phenomenology describes how one orients to lived experience. Hermeneutics describes how one interprets the "texts" of life." The question to be explored is far more important than the research method employed. The method is merely the means to live the question. van Manen believes that doing research and writing are intertwined and that the reflection required by

hermeneutic phenomenological writing brings pedagogical meaning and significance to the research.

The Primacy of the Question

According to van Manen, the question should seek to find out what something is really like. What is the nature of the lived experience? The researcher will "live the question" in that connections and meaning will be sought through non verbal cues, through shared meaning that is created via the interviewing and journaling process and through compiling, analyzing and writing about the data.

Procedures

Identification of participants

Selection of interviews initially began with the use of "encultured informants" (Spradley, 1979, p. 47) such as building principals who "know the culture well and take it as their responsibility to explain it all" (Rubin and Rubin, 1995, p.66). Rubin and Rubin have found that initial interviewees will usually mention other people as they describe events. They will often reveal those who confirm and those who oppose the views held by the interviewee. Usually initial informants will reveal who is knowledgeable in a subject matter and offer to make introductions. "Networked introductions allow a study to begin but may color the responses of later interviewees" (Rubin and Rubin, 1995, p. 68). For this reason, I identified experts who could identify inner city early childhood teachers who demonstrate a caring orientation to students and then ask identified teachers to name other teachers who exhibit similar characteristics. I identified the first

respondents by talking to elementary principals who know teachers who possess such an orientation and asked them to identify others.

Experienced teachers who had been removed from the daily context of teaching in an urban school were sought to participate in this study. It is hoped that three to five years in another school or profession has given them sufficient distance to reflect more deeply on their experiences. Some distance is needed because the immediacy and intensity of teaching in an inner city classroom allows little time for reflection on meaning, as illustrated:

> Kozol (1995) quotes a reverend on the subject of injustice, "How often do you speak about the air? If something touches every aspect of our existence, every minute of each hour of your life, it needn't be spelled out. But it's always there, a quiet understanding."

Teachers (and parents and children) who are busy surviving have little time or energy left for anything else. By purposefully seeking teachers who have physical and psychological distance from the inner city classroom, it was hoped that respondents would be able to reflect more clearly than novice teachers, or those currently entrenched in daily happenings.

Consideration was given to teachers of differing gender, relative age, and ethnicity in an attempt to provide a broader spectrum of viewpoints. Rubin and Rubin (1995) advocate getting differing points of view. These differences may be novice teachers, veteran teachers, race, gender, or ethnicity. Constraints included geographic area. Preference was given for respondents who lived or worked within a two-hour driving distance of the researcher in order to reasonably conduct data collection. All

respondents have worked with children in grade three or younger because it is during this time that a window of opportunity for effective intervention exists. The National Association for the Education of Young Children has identified early childhood as children from birth through age eight. Grade three, rather than age eight, is specified because, in my experience, many children in grade three are nine, ten, and eleven, due to school districts' policies of grade level retention.

The targeted number of respondents was three to six former teachers. Four teachers were selected. The scope of this study has been depth rather than breadth. According to Rubin and Rubin, "what is important is not how many people you talk to, but whether the answer works."

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

"Hermeneutic phenomenology tries to be attentive to both terms of its methodology: it is a *descriptive* (phenomenological) methodology because it wants to be attentive to how things appear, it wants to let things speak for themselves; it is an *interpretive* (hermeneutic) methodology because it claims that there are no such things as uninterpreted phenomena. The implied contradiction may be resolved if one acknowledges that the (phenomenological) "facts" of lived experience are always already meaningfully (hermeneutically) experienced. Moreover, even the "facts" of lived experience need to be captured in language (the human science text) and this is inevitably an interpretive process." (van Manen, 1990, p.180)

Data Collection

Multiple Sources

In gathering data, multiple sources were used including conversational interviews, written protocol, an interactive journal was requested, and autobiography. Rapport was established with each respondent first through introduction by the person who made the referral. Offering to meet in a neutral space such as a quiet restaurant, the exhibition of a genuine interest in their experiences, and the use of encouraging body language, helped to create a setting that was psychologically safe for the informants to share personal experiences. The interview began with simple informational questions to establish rapport, as respondents are less likely to reveal their feelings if there is a chance that the interviewer will be unsympathetic. (McCracken, 1988, Rogers, 1945) McCracken advocates agreeable posture and facial expression to create an atmosphere of safety for the interviewee.

Interview

Two interviews from one to three hours each per interviewee were conducted and were recorded for transcription. The tapes will be destroyed upon completion of study. The first interview was conducted in the fall following the selection of respondents. A second interview was conducted after the written protocol and during the interactive journaling; its purpose was to follow up on questions that had arisen from the first interview, the written protocol, and the journal. In hermeneutic phenomenology, the interview serves very specific purposes. It may be used as a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of human phenomenon, and may be used to develop a

conversational relationship about the meaning of an experience. The interviewer needs to be strongly oriented to the research question in order to keep the interviews on track. It is imperative to keep the interview close to the experience as it was lived. Exploring fully a concrete experience is often achieved by attentive listening and repeating final phrases, rather than following a script of predetermined questions. The interviewer is the instrument. Sample questions include:

1) Tell me about the children in your classroom.
2) Was there any part of teaching in an inner city classroom that you were unprepared for? How did you respond?
3) How did your teacher preparation program help you prepare?
4) What are some ways that teacher preparation programs might better prepare novice teachers to teach in an inner city classroom?

Protocol Writing

For the written protocol, each participant was asked to write one or two, two to three page anecdotes about their teaching. Questions about the written protocol were asked at the final interview meeting to clarify understanding. "Teachers are continuously in the midst of a blend of theory (their evolving ideas and personal belief systems) and practice (their reflective action); I refer to this blend as praxis...Praxis assumes a continuous process of critical reflection that joins and mediates theory and practice." (Schubert,1991, p.207). In order to gain a clearer picture of their lived experience and personal interpretations, participants in this study were asked to write about significant

experiences in their own lives. Participants were asked to write about what it means in their personal context to teach (or to have taught) in inner city schools.

Participants were asked to write about a strong or reoccurring memory of their inner city teaching experience. Protocol writing followed van Manen's (1990) advice in the generating of original texts. I asked the participants to:

1) Explain the experience as it was lived through, avoiding generalizations, interpretations and causes, as much as possible.
2) Describe the experience from the inside with feeling, emotions, and mood.
3) Focus on a particular example or incident.
4) Try to focus on an example of the experience, which stands out for its vividness.
5) Attend to feeling, sound, smells, etc.
6) Avoid fancy wording.

Interactive Journal

I attempted to conduct an interactive journal by e-mail or U.S. mail, preceding, concurrent to, and immediately following the two interviews. An interactive journal is a written dialogue of thoughts and questions between researcher and interviewee. Between the two interviews, respondents and researcher had an opportunity to write or e-mail thoughts and clarifications, as well as record ideas for the second interview. However, each respondent having agreed to an email exchange, simply did not send or respond in writing to emailed questions, despite several reminders. One respondent finally expressed that she was not really comfortable with her understanding of email, even

though her family encouraged her to use it. I suspect this was the case with other respondents as well. In the end, we communicated through telephone conversations and a written response to chapter four rather than through a written journal.

Autobiography

For the autobiographical section, I answered the interview questions that were posed to the other respondents, drawing from my own inner city classroom experiences. I have written a brief anecdote from my own teaching experiences as well in order to explore my own understanding of the experiences and to seek deeper meaning and to make connections between my own understanding and those of the other respondents.

Data Analysis

Themes often emerge from data sources through the process of analyzing and writing about them. van Manen (1990) refers to theme analysis as a free act of seeing data. Rubin and Rubin (1995) refer to it as the art of hearing data. Themes are the structures of experience, according to van Manen, who adds: "Theme is the experience of focus, of meaning, of point. Theme formulation is at best a simplification. Themes are not objects. Theme is the form of capturing the phenomenon one tries to understand" (p.87).

Some themes may be common to several of the subjects, others may be unique to particular individuals but still significant to the study. There are three approaches to uncovering and isolating themes identified by van Manen (1990, p. 92-93):

The holistic, or *sententious approach*, which looks for overall meaning.

The selective approach, which looks for phrases that seem to express a theme of the experience, and

The detailed, or *line by line approach*, in which the investigator looks closely at individual sentences and sentence clusters.

This study has utilized the selective or highlighting approach. Phrases were sought that seemed to be thematic of the experience of teaching in inner city early childhood classrooms. van Manen identifies the two types of themes as essential themes and incidental themes. Essential themes contain the essence of meaning. Incidental themes, also called unique themes, are important to the study, but are not defining. "In the process of apprehending essential themes or essential relationships, one asks the question: 'Is this phenomenon still the same if we imaginatively change or delete this theme from the phenomenon?' For example we presume the notion of having offspring or children is essential to the notion of parenting. Does the phenomenon without this theme lose its fundamental meaning?" (van Manen, 1990, p.107).

Ethical Issues

This study was submitted to the Institutional Review Board for approval. Care was taken to disguise the identity of participants and the location of their schools. Names were changed and geographic locations have been described in general terms. Participants were asked to sign an informed consent form and have been given an opportunity to grant permission for information gathered to be used in subsequent books

or journal articles. I have shared emerging data with respondents and asked them to validate what is written. van Manen (1990, p. 162-163) points out that,

(1) The research may have certain effects on the people with whom the research is concerned and who will be interested in the phenomenological work. They may feel discomfort, anxiety, false hope, superficiality, guilt, self-doubt, irresponsibility but also hope, increased awareness, moral stimulation, insight, a sense of liberation, a certain thoughtfulness, and so on.

(2) The possible effects of the research methods on the institutions in which the research is conducted. For example, health practices may be challenged or changed as a consequence of increased awareness of the experience of birth by the mother, child, and father.

(3) The research methods used may have lingering effects on the actual "subjects" involved in the study. For example, intensive conversational interviews may lead to new levels of self-awareness, possible changes in life style, and shifting priorities of living. But, if done badly, these methods may instead lead to feelings of anger, distrust, defeat, intolerance, insensitivity, etc.

(4) Phenomenological projects and their methods often have a transformative effect on the researcher himself or herself. Indeed, phenomenological research is often itself a form of deep learning, leading to a transformation of consciousness, heightened perceptiveness, increased thoughtfulness and tact, and so on.

Assumptions

Teacher Preparation -Teacher preparation programs are designed to prepare pre-service teachers to teach in any public school situation. However, many new teachers feel overwhelmed and unprepared for inner city classrooms (Haberman, 1995).

Autobiography - It is assumed that my personal experiences in three inner city schools with high minority populations and very low socio-economic status (SES) students, and in two urban schools with slightly higher SES and slightly lower minority student population have revealed any biases and have added validity to my interpretations of the experiences of others. It was the combination of my experiences that led me to this study. By responding myself, I hope to create deeper meaning from the other participant's responses.

Missing voices - The voices of inner city early childhood teachers are not being heard. Teacher narrative often focuses on teachers of older children and suburban school districts. I believe that the experience of early childhood teachers is different from that of intermediate and secondary teachers, in part due to the dependence of young children on their teachers, and the connection with the family of a child is usually closer in the primary grades. I also believe that inner city teaching is different from suburban or rural teaching due to the greater number of students with special needs and families with less support to provide for their children. Inner city schools tend to be located in areas where eroded tax bases have left the school buildings themselves poor, in disrepair, and unhealthy.

Limitations

In keeping with the qualitative nature of this study, I did not seek to discover information that is generalizable back to a specific population. In contrast, I hoped to make evident truths that can be applied to many situations through the interaction of the reader and the text. I have sought to facilitate this interchange by providing thick rich description. Results of the study may or may not resonate with the experiences of those who read the study.

Definitions

Autobiographical Narrative - Personal experiences of the researcher that, through the act of writing, clarify the writer's own perceptions and help to assign meaning to lived experiences and to make connections with the experiences of the respondents in the study.

Urban / Inner City Schools - I have used these terms interchangeably to denote schools located predominantly in urban ghetto areas where jobs and tax base have disappeared. It should be noted that not all urban schools are "inner city" and that not all urban or inner city schools fit the low socio-economic status, racially mixed, or segregated minority schools referenced by these terms.

Participant - I have used the term participant to refer to the subjects of this study. Participants are also referred to as respondents or conversation partners.

Protocol Writing - A brief reflection, or anecdote, written by participants of the study. My purpose in requesting written protocol was to allow the participant to reflect and voice experiences through the deeply personal activity of writing.

Interactive Journal Writing - The participants were asked to keep a journal of thoughts and questions between interviews. It was hoped that e-mail would be available to the participants to make the journaling process more efficient. If e-mail had been unavailable, conventional mail would have been used to exchange journals with participants.

Resiliency - When I use term resiliency, I refer to elasticity as it is possible in human terms. A human, whether child or adult, may experience recovery, they may regain a sense of normalcy, but humans cannot recover from traumatic life events as fully as if the trauma had never occurred. Even the most resilient person will bear the physical and psychological scars of the trauma they have experienced or witnessed.

CHAPTER FOUR

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

LAURA HINES WILHELM

4-16-99

This autobiographical section was intended as a means for me to explore my own understandings, reveal my personal biases, and to provide a clearer explanation as to how and why I came to my research question. From 1988 to 1995, I taught in five low-income elementary schools in three large cities. My experiences with different school district, administrators, colleagues, and children has given me many opportunities to compare and reflect upon what seems to be working and what challenges are presented by inner city teaching. I believe my personal experiences have given me unique insights into the realities of teaching in inner city schools. My background has effected both the questions I posed, and provided a basis of understanding and interpreting the responses of the participants in this study. My position as an "insider" may also have effected the types of answers given by respondents. In this section I will give a brief personal and family history, then I will respond to the same interview questions that I asked the participants, and share my own written protocol, following the instructions given to the other interviewees.

Autobiography

Just call me "Little Hines." Growing up as the seventh child in a very small town, I didn't really need a first name; everyone just knew me as the littlest one. With five big brothers and a big sister, I became something of a master manipulator and quite proficient

at yelling for mom. I didn't have many dates as a teenager, maybe because my brothers were all football players. Once, when I asked my seventh grade science teacher for some help, she replied, "Your brothers were smart, you understand this stuff." Thanks, that was certainly helpful.

My parents regarded education highly and held tremendous respect for the school, even during cases of educational malpractice such as the punitive teacher who made one of my brothers stay at school after having a toileting accident to "teach him." And the high school counselor who decided not to tell another brother that his ACT score allowed him a "full ride" scholarship to a large university because, according to her, "he should go to a smaller college." Unfortunately for him, the smaller college also had a much smaller scholarship, and he ended up transferring to the larger university anyway to get his chosen major without benefit of the scholarship!

My mother was born March 3, 1926 in Lidalisk, Arkansas, the second of six children. My father was born in Fox, Arkansas, the eighth of nine children, on May 7, 1915, the same day a German submarine sank the British liner *Lusitania* and contributed to America's entering World War I. In rural Arkansas in the early part of the century, attending secondary schools was a luxury. My mother completed eighth grade (so, using maternal education as a predictor of school failure, I guess I really shouldn't be here). My father completed eleventh grade and then high school equivalency in the army. He worked as an aircraft repairman in the Army Air Corps, stationed in England near the Sherwood Forest during World War II. He also owned a 200-acre farm, cut and hauled timber for a sawmill, ran a garage, and in 1946 moved his wife and first four children to this state where he worked again in aircraft maintenance at an Air Force base until he

retired in 1979. He died of lung cancer in 1985 at the end of my freshman year in college. My mother didn't work outside the home, but she farmed, chopped cotton, hunted, fished, sewed, gardened, cooked and preserved the large amounts of food required by a family of nine. When I interviewed my mother for this autobiography, she wanted me to be sure to mention that she also, "Makes the best apricot preserves that my friend Myrtle Cottles ever tasted." She is proud of her seven children, ten grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.

My responses to the Interview Questions

1) Tell me about some children in your classes.

When I remember teaching in inner city schools, the memories are not of teaching colors and shapes and the usual academics of pre- kindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade. I remember instead stories of children whose lives crossed mine though the common path of our classroom. I remember very young parents, who saw me as an expert, although I didn't even see myself as competent. I remember wonderful children whose eyes cut through all my pretenses, who forced me to face my prejudices, whose love forgave all my mistakes, even before I knew enough to realize how much I didn't know. I remember children who taught me far more than I ever taught them!

I remember Satin, a tiny, beautiful five year old, whose consistently inappropriate behaviors resulted in the other teachers referring to her as Satan. Yet, her spirit was so generous that when I complimented her jacket, she said, "You like it? I'll tell my momma to steal you one."

I remember Jonah. His grandmother told me that I was prejudiced against him because he wasn't as poor as the other children. I was completely stunned by the pronouncement. As she made her way triumphantly out my classroom door, confident that she had put me in my place, I turned and sagged against the splintery old wooden door completely forgetting that Jonah was still in my classroom. As I sighed in frustration, he called out, "Why are you rolling your eyes, Miss Hines?" loudly enough for his grandmother, who was still on the steps, to hear. Oops.

I am from the "whitewash" generation. We just didn't talk about race, and certainly didn't celebrate differences. We ignored them. I honestly thought it was correct and respectful to believe that everyone was "the same underneath their skin." My students didn't allow my ignorance to continue. One day Jason, a kindergartner in an all black school where I was teaching, said, "I'm going to use a brown crayon because I'm brown." Other children became very interested, "You are? What am I?" Unfortunately, this was before "people color" crayons were available, so our choices were limited. I remember Philip, who was so skilled and smooth in social interactions that the principal called him "the future president." All spring he asked me to come to his baseball games. I really wanted to, but I had never attended any public function outside school in this neighborhood. I always found myself too busy on game days. When the teacher next door told him she couldn't come to his game because she would be the only white person there, I thought, "How awful." Then I realized at least she was honest, and I hadn't been, even with myself.

The next year, when Megan invited me to her birthday party, I decided it was time to have a little of the bravery I expected of my students each time they ventured into the

"white world," and attended. I did chicken out a little at the last minute and brought along my niece and nephew. At the time, I thought it was just because I wanted my students to meet my family and my family to meet some of my students. Later I realized that it was more likely the case that I still didn't want to be the only one. When we were sitting on the back porch, one of Megan's friends looked me over carefully and asked, "Is your teacher white or something?" Megan said, "I don't know. We don't talk about that stuff." At the time I thought it was a cool response. It was like she was saying, "race isn't important," only later did I realize that it wasn't unimportant, just uncomfortable, and conversationally unsafe to talk about it.

At two of the schools where I taught, my students didn't have a lot of interaction with white people and would argue with me that I wasn't really white. A friend explained that they know that white people are mean and unlovable; because the children loved me, I couldn't be white. Kevin, five, finally conceded, "Well, you might be white, but you're not crazy like the rest of them white folks!"

I believe pets are very important in children's lives. When they are in the classroom, they add a dimension of community through shared ownership and responsibility. Many of the children I taught lived in neighborhoods where animals were taunted and abused. Over the years, a host of animals have been a part in my classrooms, from the hamster who liked to hang out in the spine of the three ring binders on my desk, to the parakeets that a welfare mother donated; cage, food, and all. It was a way she could be a part of our classroom without risking embarrassment from her lack of education. The first rabbit, Myrna Sue, was a white dwarf who had outlived her

productive days at a neighborhood rabbit farm and was saved from the stew by my sad tale of pre-kindergartners who needed a pet.

The rabbit was donated, and then I spent twenty-five dollars on the cage and supplies. She hopped through my learning centers, recesses, and group times for two and a half years until my school burned down. She actually lived through the fire, but her respiratory system was so damaged that she died during the same night. We buried her in the flowerbed so that, like the cat in *The Tenth Good Thing About Barney* by Judith Viorst, she could help the flowers grow.

Chet, a first grader, and his mother went to a flea market the next weekend and found, what else, Myrna Sue II. She was also a white dwarf but only a few weeks old and so tiny that her legs went through the wire mesh of the rabbit cage, so we had to keep her in a bird cage. The whole school moved into a local church while our building was being rebuilt. It's hard to imagine all of the security in the mundane ordinariness of daily life, until you lose something as seemingly permanent as school or home. We slowly began to reestablish old rituals and build new ones. For example, each day, the pastor of the church would stop by our room to check on "Lunch," his nickname for Myrna Sue II, and then the children would boo him out of the room, "You can't eat our rabbit!" She became a symbol of rebuilding for our whole school and was featured on the local six o' clock news with her new family of first graders and the Sunday school room that was now our home.

Myrna Sue II was killed two years later at James, the last school where I taught. James Elementary was located in a completely segregated area of a large city. Our school was broken into at least twice a month. One morning the custodian came to

school and found Myrna's dead body in a trash sack on my desk. The police had been called the night before, and their dogs had killed her. The children were very angry and spent the day setting up police dog traps around the room whenever they didn't think I was looking. I was frustrated that the police didn't even leave a note. We spent a lot of time in the coming weeks talking about natural predators and that it wasn't really the dog's fault, they were just being dogs, and that the policemen probably didn't know there was a rabbit in the classroom.

I remember three cousins who were all in my class the same year. They all lived with their fathers in their grandmother's house, which was also their place of "business." The dads would stand in the driveway or street and sell drugs to people who drove up in their cars. Donnie, Metri, and Lyon would beg me to come visit their house. I did weekly home visits, but I always gave parents the option of coming to school because I didn't want to be in their homes unwelcomed. I hated to turn down the boys request, so I would just say, "As soon as I'm invited by your grandma." I knew that wasn't going to happen. Each time I would drive through the housing project where most of my students lived, one of the three dads would let me know, "Saw your little truck in the neighborhood yesterday, Miss Hines." I figured I was pretty safe with those three dads looking out for me.

I remember Mandy who, on the days she actually came to school, would crawl under a table and stay there until the end of the day. When I tried to coax her out, she would just cry. So I finally met with her mom and said, "You know, I think she's just not ready to be at school yet." Her mom said, "Oh no! She comes home every day and sings

all the songs, repeats all the stories, and tells me everything the class did." Mandy's story made me realize that children are learning, even when they don't appear to be.

Listening to children's comments has added dimensions to my classroom experience. I could get a pretty good idea about interactions in their homes by watching children take on the role of the mother, baby, or "uncle" as they invented or reenacted family dramas in the housekeeping center. Each Mother's Day, I invited parents to a "Mother's Day Tea." Children wore dress-up clothes, and we spent about a week making invitations, decorations, and cookies. Once a child told me, "My momma said she don't want none of your nasty old tea!" I knew her mother might or might not have said that. I also knew she was mirroring the use of power language that she had heard in other places. I said., "That's OK," but I did try to think of ways to involve parents in the classroom that had more to do with every day life, rather than a tea party.

Others that stand out in my mind include a little girl who always had head lice and would rub her head against me. I'm sure it itched. I tried to avoid contact with her hair without being too obvious. Finally, I just bought lice shampoo to keep in my shower and use from time to time, just to be safe. There were amazing children of migrant farm workers who had traveled up from Mexico. Five-year-olds would act as interpreters for classmates and even parents who didn't speak English.

Probably the biggest impression was made by Krystal, a kindergartner who drew step-by-step instructions for me on how to use a crack pipe; at that time I was a stressed-out first-year teacher, and she probably thought I needed to know!

2) Was there any part of teaching that you were unprepared for? How did you respond?

I remember parents who hadn't had especially good experiences in school themselves. Megan's and DeNiqua's moms were perfectly nice and friendly, but their body language made them appear to be ready for a fight. On many occasions, when they would come to my room to visit, others would pop their heads in to make sure I was okay. Katie, a nineteen year old mom of a four-year-old, taught our class to make fry bread and then cried as she told me how scared she was about doing the right things as a parent. Teen pregnancies were so common in the neighborhood that it wasn't unusual for me to be older than the parents of my children, even at age twenty two. This was especially hard for me because I felt like they expected me to be an expert on everything from disabilities to rashes.

I also wasn't prepared for disasters. I suppose no one ever is. In seven years, I experienced a flooded classroom from burst pipes, a midnight phone call informing me that our school was burning down, a nearby bombing, regular break-ins, and a "restructuring" plan to raise test scores which resulted in negative experiences for families, children, and teachers. The plan involved six "low performing" elementary schools in the district. Teachers, custodians, and cooks received a letter that said that they had lost their jobs. We later found out that we were to reapply for our jobs, but only those of us who had been teaching less than three years were allowed to stay. We were furious because this sent the message to the community that staff changes were the simple solution to low test scores. We were not pleased by the replacement teachers, who came into our building and announced, "We're going to save this school." No one

ever mentioned that the school's population was 99% free lunch, an indicator of income level, and located in the highest crime area of the city. They also neglected to publicize the manipulation of statistics by assuring that all of those children most likely to score poorly on the standardized achievement test were deemed ineligible to take the test in the following school year. In a district where teachers had always had to fight for special services, suddenly we had psychometrists testing children six days a week. Interestingly, over 80% of our third graders, the grade level identified to determine the school's "risk for failure" were not tested due to their new eligibility for special education and Limited English Proficiency status. The superintendent hailed the "success," "proven" by the rise in test scores. Many good teachers lost their faith in the school system.

3) How did your teacher education program help you prepare?

Two people were especially helpful in preparing me to become a teacher. The first was my professor, mentor, and friend, Dr. Mari Scott. The first time I met her, I was deciding between majoring in early childhood education or elementary education. She said, "We'll convince you to major in early childhood education," and she did. She instilled a passion for teaching in each of her students and inspired me to pursue both a master's and a doctorate in ECE as well. Lucy Calkins says that you can't do anything until you can first imagine yourself doing it. Mari helped me to imagine my future.

The second part of my teacher preparation program that was especially helpful, but seemed overwhelming at the time, was my student teaching experience, which I refer to as the "baptism by fire." On the first day of student teaching, Sandy, the cooperating teacher I knew from a class said, "You're good; you can handle this," and walked out of

the classroom. I rarely saw her again during the six weeks I worked in her classroom. It was sink or swim with thirty inner city kindergartners in the morning and thirty more in the afternoon. When I finished student teaching and applied for a teaching position in the district, Sandy said to the hiring principal, "You need to hire this girl. She's as bad as I used to be." I got the job.

The first mentoring relationship mentioned above gave me hope and inspiration, as well as realistic expectations, and a fire in my heart to make life better for young children through teaching. The second proved to me that I could, in fact, handle it. Sandy's confidence in my abilities helped the parents and teachers at the school accept me as more of an insider. The student teaching experience convinced me of the importance and rewards of working with "at-risk" children.

4) What are some ways that teacher education programs might better prepare novice teachers for inner city classrooms?

First, I think there must be mentors. I believe resilient teachers will seek out their own mentors, but there may need to be a more formal system for helping others, such as through support groups or teams of teachers with planned times each week to discuss difficulties and possible solutions. Second, I think universities, administrators, and ultimately the public, must realize that teaching inner city children is in fact qualitatively and quantitatively different than teaching in small towns or rural areas. We need to adjust our expectations for teaching and learning, and then we need to find creative ways to meet the multiple demands. I don't mean lower standards. I mean meet children where they are and help them reach their potential.

In the following section, I have written about an experience in the manner I asked the respondents to write their own narratives: explained as it is lived through, avoiding generalizations and interpretations as much as possible, described with feeling emotion and mood, focusing on a particular example, attending to senses, and avoiding fancy wording.

Written Protocol

Outsider

Laura Hines Wilhelm

4-22-99

Larry came to my class in the middle of his kindergarten year. He was tall, thin, quiet, and had closely cropped hair and very dark skin. He was always dressed neatly with his plaid cotton shirts buttoned all the way to the top. His sister Mary, in second grade, would walk him to class 10 to 15 minutes late each day. I never met his mother until, at the end of the quarter, I needed her to sign his report card and a permission slip for a field trip. Like most of my students, there was no telephone in the home, so I decided the best way to meet with his mom was to walk Larry home at the end of the day.

His sister was absent that day, so I asked Larry for directions to his house. It sounded far away, past the high school. I checked his file to make sure and found out that he lived nearly three miles away, not even in the attendance area of our school. He and his sister were walking every day through some of the highest crime areas of the city. They walked right past housing projects that the firemen had told me they wouldn't enter without a police escort and past an empty guard shack that was finally abandoned because the guards kept getting shot. I decide to drive him home rather than walk. He

showed me which apartment was his, but there was a "NO PARKING" sign where I pulled in, so I let Larry out to go tell his mom that I was there. I pulled around to the other side of the housing project and two undercover policemen stopped right behind my car and asked if I were lost. I told them I was bringing my student home, which they may not have believed since I had already let Larry out to get his mom. They told me to go back around to the side street and that it wasn't really safe for me to be there at all. I saw Larry and his mom come out of their apartment so I drove back around.

She said she was living here with seven small children and had enrolled them in our school because she wanted the best for them; she was on a waiting list for safer housing. While we were talking, a van pulled in beside me and the driver asked if I was waving her down (I think she was selling drugs). Larry's mom said, no, I was her child's teacher, quickly signed my papers, explained about some of his recent absences, and then told me that I really should get out of there, so I left.

As I pulled out onto the main road, I saw the undercover cops were right behind me, I wondered if they were making sure that I was leaving and that I wasn't circling back. Suddenly, I was acutely aware of the invisible safety of my quiet modest neighborhood and the "white privilege" of rarely being in a place where I stood out because of my skin color. I felt ashamed for being scared when all I had to do was drive away, to feel safe. What chance did that family have to feel safe? Their whole lives were fenced in, boarded up, and patrolled. They didn't have the option of driving across town to a place where kids could play safely in yards and ride bikes around the neighborhood until dark without a thought of shootings or drug dealers.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS

In identifying respondents for this study, I first contacted two principals in large, metropolitan school districts. I tried to contact a third principal from a third metropolitan area in this state but was unsuccessful in contacting him and gave up after five phone calls were not returned. Both principals whom I was able to contact are recently retired and considered to be expert practitioners in urban elementary education by their former administrators and staff. These principals recommended fourteen teachers for this study. I began calling the teachers on the lists. Some of the teachers whom I contacted thought it would be too time consuming. Others were reluctant and said they would be willing, but only if I couldn't find anyone else. After two days of phone calls, I finally found four respondents who were eager to participate. The educators who did agree to participate in the study were people I had met when I was a classroom teacher, although I had not seen any of them in many years. Having had previous acquaintance and some familiarity with my background may have added a sense of trust and increased their willingness to participate in this study. I had never met any of the teachers who declined to participate.

I was pleased to discover that this small group contained diversity in gender, ethnicity, age, and economic background. Although they represent three different school districts and do not all know one another, their interviews and narratives revealed consistency of concern for the individual child and a belief in the possibility and importance of making the world a better place for all children. The first teacher I met

with was Agnes

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Agnes

With short brown curly hair and freckles, Agnes looks as if she could be related to Amelia Earhart. Her gruff voice is followed by a quick grin. Agnes is from a white middle class background and has taught for seventeen years. She is now teaching a split fourth and fifth grade classroom, although she has taught younger children. She has prior experience teaching overseas for the Department of Defense and teaching special education in this and other states. Agnes' classroom is filled with teaching materials: scientific charts and graphs, globes, computers and overflowing bookshelves. Children's writing covers one wall. I asked her about the nameplate over her door that says, "Mrs. Frizzle," a reference to the eccentric science teacher from the children's book series, *Magic School Bus.* She just smiled and shook her head as though the connection was obvious.

During the interviews Agnes expressed frustration with parents who do not encourage enough responsibility in children as well as frustration with social services whose responsibility it is to protect children. It is also troublesome to her that school systems focus so much time and resources on testing children.

Julia

Julia, the second interviewee, teaches in the same school as Agnes. When I first entered Julia's room, she was finishing a lesson. She saw me in the hall and said, "Come in, come in, you need to see the children. They are what it's all about." One of the

children then waved me over and asked me to read a story she had been writing, as though it were perfectly natural for strangers to be accepted into the group. She is from a white upper-middleclass background and has been teaching over thirty years. Julia is now semi-retired and only teaches a couple of days each week. Her voice still retains a hint of New England dialect despite the fact that she has taught in this Southwestern city long enough to have taught the children and grandchildren of her former students. Her platinum hair and neat appearance cause me to stand up a little straighter.

The message of hope Julia conveys is that although there is still work to be done she has seen improvement with each generation of children she has taught. She has found that social programs such as free and reduced breakfast and lunch have resulted in healthier children and that parents are becoming more involved in their children's lives. After our interview she gave me directions to a small rural school district outside town where I found Tom.

Tom

I have always been a little jealous of male teachers. I'm not sure if it's their height, voice, or presence that causes children to stop whatever they may be doing and give full attention when a man enters the classroom. I can remember Tom, about six foot three inches tall with a deep commanding voice, having just that effect when he would walk into my first grade classroom the year we taught in the same building. I was a bit surprised at the depth of reflection Tom expressed through the interviews. He is from a white lower-middleclass background. Tom shared inner struggles and thoughtful insights into the meaning of teaching. He shared experiences of working with mothers who had

such negative experiences with men that they did not welcome a male teacher for their children. He shared his personal story of resiliency, of growing up in a home with an alcoholic father, the principal who predicted he would be a "loser", and the teacher who taught him that reasonable people do exist.

Tom's office, as principal of a tiny rural elementary school, was located at the back of the school rather than at the front entrance. It was decorated with pictures of his wife and three children as well as a large collection of coffee cups.

Merissa

Echoing Tom's deep concern for children and commitment to understanding families, was the final interviewee, Merissa. Merissa, now a special education teacher after spending many years as an inner city kindergarten teacher, was filling in for the building principal the week of the first interview. She looked right at home behind the principal's desk, with her lithe frame in constant motion while giving out directions for organizing the Christmas pageant and dealing with a child's nosebleed. During the second interview, I met her at her special education classroom which was bright and inviting. Activities were set up for students to be able to come in and work in various interest centers designed for their individual needs. She is from a black upper-middleclass background.

Merissa shared a deep concern for children and their parents and expressed a desire to learn more and be able to do more in the area of parent education. Through our conversations, Merissa often referred to former students and continued to wonder about those who hadn't kept in touch with her over the years.

Star Teachers

Martin Haberman, distinguished professor of Education at the University of Wisconsin, is widely cited as an expert in urban education and teacher preparation. His book *Star Teachers of Children in Poverty* was commissioned by Kappa Delta Pi in 1995 as part of their "Educators Who Make a Difference Series." The Haberman Foundation in Houston Texas "trains universities and schools to select teachers who will be effective with children in poverty." According to Martin Haberman (1995), only five to eight percent of the teachers in the nation's 120 largest school districts are "star teachers." A building with twenty teachers would then have about two star teachers, which seems in my experience to be a reasonable number. I do, however, have some difficulty with Haberman's definition of a "star teacher." He writes that stars are, "Teachers who, by all common criteria, are outstandingly successful: their students score higher on standardized tests; parents and children think they are great; principals rate them highly; other teachers regard them as outstanding; central office supervisors consider them successful; cooperating universities regard them as superior; and they evaluate themselves as outstanding teachers" (p. 1). I have difficulty with Haberman's assessment because I don't think I have ever met anyone who meets every one of these subjective criteria. He implies a consensus of the definition of excellence in teaching that I have not experienced from the audiences he has described.

In the first example of common criteria for star teachers, higher student test scores, it has been my experience that some teachers whose students score high on standardized tests spend the year preparing for test-taking to the exclusion of more

authentic learning activities. So, I would not use high test scores as clear evidence of excellent teaching, especially in the early grades. Haberman said parents and students think they (stars) are great. Inner city parents are usually distrustful of any teacher until the teacher has had several years to build a reputation for being trustworthy. Then they tend to favor those who send home lots of worksheets, which are interpreted as tangible evidence of good teaching. Children's affection for teachers can depend on many factors, although I do think children are generally shrewd judges of character. Haberman said building principals rate star teachers highly. In two of the districts where I have taught, principals are sometimes placed in inner city schools when they fail to "make it" in the suburbs. Such principals have tended to favor teachers who take over administrative tasks and don't make any waves. Other teachers, busy trying to survive themselves, in my experience, can be wary of anyone who works harder, longer, or is otherwise "different," and may tend to be more free with criticism than praise for colleagues.

Stars are considered successful by central office administrators, according to Haberman. I have known few central office administrators in large school districts who knew individual classroom teachers personally other than those teachers who were active in the union or in-service presentations. University personnel are supposed to rate star teachers as superior, but they are as diverse as teachers themselves and tend to rate most highly those teachers whose philosophies are consistent with their own. As for the teachers themselves, I believe the best teachers are keenly aware of their shortcomings and are constantly trying to improve and learn more, rather than rating themselves as outstanding.

Another part of Haberman's work that has created a great deal of cognitive

dissonance for me is his creation of such a sharp dichotomy. Urban teachers are, in his analysis, either "Stars or Quitters and Failures." This is much too simplistic for the complex realities of inner city teaching. One example is the variety of points of view mentioned above. There is no clear consensus of what teaching styles are regarded as being successful. I once worked in a program where IQ score gains routinely averaged eight points per child over one year. These same children's school attendance went up significantly and their attitudes about school and their assessment of their personal capabilities grew dramatically. The funding for the program was later discontinued because the standardized test scores didn't go up a significant enough amount, despite the fact that gains in standardized test scores were never a stated goal of the program. Also, there are clearly many teachers who neither fit his criteria for stars nor do they quit and fail, but occupy a gray space between the two extremes. Those teachers' stories are punctuated by a few happily-ever-afters and little-ones-that-got-away, rather than heroic epics of unified praises for their work.

Despite my bias stated above, I believe Martin Haberman has a significant contribution to make in defining characteristics of successful urban teachers, especially from the child's point of view; it is the criterion which I believe matters most. When the Star / Quitter dichotomy is put to one side, there are useful insights into realities experienced by inner city teachers, stated matter-of-factly without pity or indignation. Haberman has identified a set of characteristics describing not only "star teacher's" functions but also their perceptions and actions. I find it informative when addressing my question, "What does it mean to teach for resiliency in an inner city classroom?" to compare my respondents' interviews with Haberman's findings.

I found that although my respondents exhibited most of the functions Haberman calls for, their long interviews and narratives also revealed insights into the complexity and daily struggle of urban teaching that is missing in Haberman's work. Where Haberman's truths are straightforward, linear and didactic, I found teacher's lived experience to be complicated, and at times contradictory. In my study, truths are multiple, and teachers are in the midst of an ever-evolving dance of inventing and interpreting theory with their practice.

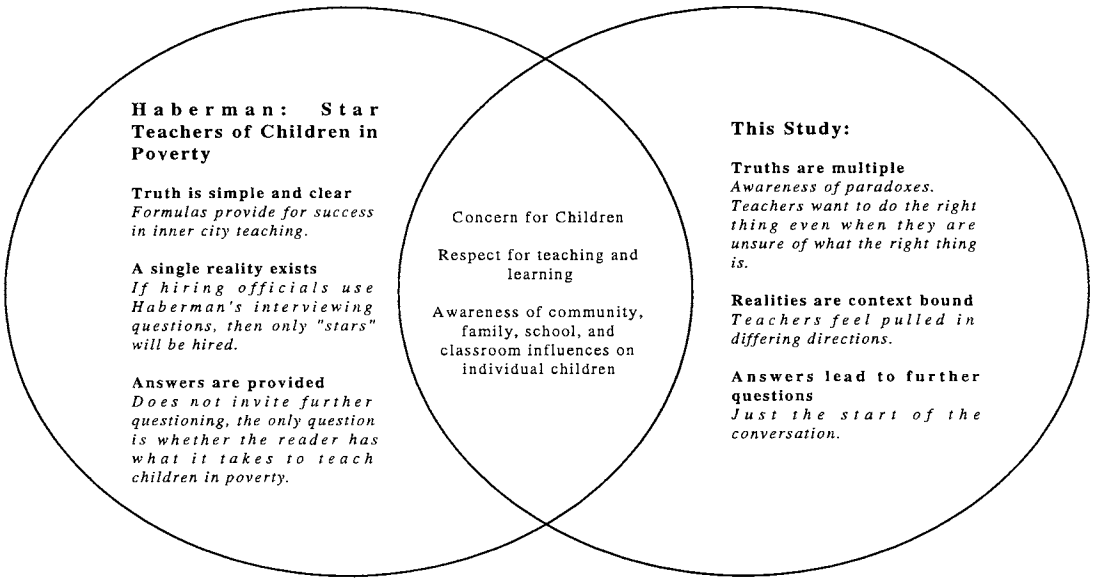

Figure 1. Contrasting Haberman with this study.

The difference in Haberman's findings and my own may be due to the method of data collection. Haberman speaks of conducting over 1,000 interviews with star teachers, yet on the rare occasion when he directly quotes a teacher in his book, it is a short answer to a very direct question. Typically he refers to his personal observations and experience.

He does not attempt to give voice to teachers themselves or allow their stories to speak for themselves. In contrast, he explains the implications and meanings that he has drawn for us in great detail. The only question he leaves unanswered is whether the reader "has what it takes" to teach children in poverty.

Haberman describes Early Childhood teachers as "iron fists in velvet gloves" (p.74), the most authoritarian and directive of teachers. He suggests that children's intermediate, middle, and high school failure is directly attributable to preschool and primary teachers who are controlling despite their outward kindness. My interviewees were all former primary teachers, but they did not fit neatly into Haberman's cookie cutter description of Early Childhood teachers who "play school" (p.76) by focusing on low-level direct instruction and external behavior control.

Functions of Star Teachers

Persistence

The first function attributed to stars by Haberman is persistence, characterized by creativity and problem solving ability.

Julia has demonstrated persistence through years of experiences. Now even in retirement, she continues to teach part time. Agnes illustrated problem solving ability in her work preparing children for Special Olympics. Merissa has shown creativity in making various religious groups feel a sense of belonging in her classroom. Tom demonstrates creativity and problem solving in his second interview when he relates the stories of two boys whose medications made it difficult for them, or anyone else, to

control their behavior. In the first case, a boy in Tom's class became very active as his morning Ritalin began to wear off and before his afternoon dose kicked in. Following a doctor's advice to let these children burn off their extra energy, Tom opened the back door of his classroom and allowed this child to run back and forth across the playground a few times. The other children were then able to continue their work without interruptions, and this child was able to release pent up energy. Tom attributed the classmates' acceptance of their peer being allowed "extra recess" to the sense of classroom community they had established and the understanding that people have differing needs.

Another child, after Tom became a principal, took allergy medications with steroids that caused him to become aggressive. This child was so upset by his change in behavior that he would cry each time he had to take the medicine. The school counselor had a punching bag in her office, and the child was able to go there for ten or fifteen minutes to release his aggressions. So Tom was able to help both of these children whose lack of regulation in their medicine, or the medicine itself, caused inappropriate behavior and at the same time was able to help fellow students see the "fairness" in responding to individual needs (Appendix C, Interview 2).

Protecting Learners and Learning

Haberman believes star teachers are able to protect their students and learning by allowing for flexibility in the curriculum.

Julia shared a story of a student who asked her to read a book to the class. After several days, Julia decided to read the book despite thinking of all the others, of better

quality and relevance, that she would have preferred to read. The child was thrilled to have her book read and "her face radiated happiness." She soon moved to Arkansas to be reunited with her father, and Julia realized it had probably been the little girl's only book that she brought to share with her classmates. A few weeks later, Julia read about a fire that killed the child and her entire family. This story reminds us that what we do affects more than just our daily schedule and that children are people with lives both in and outside of our classrooms (Appendix A, Written Protocol).

Tom described his work with a magnet program designed to protect learners, "We didn't want to wait until these children are in junior high to find out they are so far behind that they want to drop out. We wanted to catch them and make school a positive experience, so they could continue to find school a positive experience from then on. We also wanted to take the approach of preventing problems instead of being a punitive alternative site where they go after they've already gotten into trouble. We wanted to save that. We wanted to create some positive experiences that would prevent the need for a punitive situation. We tried all kinds of positive approaches. Just anything that would make them enjoy school" (Appendix C, Interview 1).

Agnes protected learners through an individualized reading program serving each child's level and interest. Merissa also individualized instruction for each lab student.

Generalizations: Putting Ideas into Practice

Haberman writes that some teachers are able to talk about theory while others are able to put it into practice, but star teachers can both verbalize about teaching and incorporate theory into action.

Merissa shares how her special education classes have helped her understand the needs of children who have been affected by drug use. She was trained during a time when babies were being affected by drugs prescribed by doctors during pregnancy. In her career she has applied that knowledge to children born addicted to marijuana, crack cocaine, and alcohol. She has been able to adjust her teaching and expectations to the abilities of these children rather than expect them to fit the "norm" (Appendix D, Interview 1).

Merissa and Agnes both talked about helping children gain responsibility for their work in the classroom and helping parents understand that their children needed to assume such responsibility. Tom created classroom community by helping children to see each other's special needs and providing opportunities for children to use their talents, even if it was teaching other third graders how to iron clothes. Julia explained how social programs and public education are improving the lives of her students.

Approach to At Risk Students

Children labeled 'At Risk' for school failure exceed 50% of the population in almost all urban school districts. This conglomeration of problems is lumped together and is defined as exceeding typical teachers' ability to handle them. Star teachers do not blame the victims. They seek strategies regardless of background and obstacles (Haberman, 1995).

Agnes relates the difficulties associated with planning curriculum to meet an ever-changing classroom of children. Inner city children often move several times a year due to families moving between apartments across town to avoid paying rent, or losing jobs,

moving in and out of friends' and relatives homes or shelters, or children being moved between foster homes. Agnes tells the story of a child who moved into her classroom in the middle of the year and had already mastered advanced topics but had not been introduced to more basic concepts in mathematics (Appendix B, Interview 2). Not only must a teacher meet the needs of these children, they must also temper expectations because they don't know from day to day whether each student will even be returning.

Tom asks, "How are you going to teach higher thinking skills when most of your children are struggling just to survive? When their brain is in survival mode, they physically can't do higher order thinking. We want to have high expectations, but what do you teach third graders who haven't even mastered the skills identified with second grade? When I know I'm only going to have a child in my class for a month, how can I make it worthwhile?" (Appendix C, Interview 2).

Julia's expresses high expectations for her students tempered with sensitivity for their unique circumstances. Merissa believes more teachers need to address all the learning styles of students.

Professional- Personal Orientation to Students

Haberman writes that star teachers do not have to love each of their students. All students may not, in fact, be loveable. Star teachers use words like caring, respect and trust. They are aware of students' needs and are sensitive to their individual situations. Each interview showed several examples of such thoughtful orientation to students. For example, Julia talked about a program designed to prevent failure in 'at-risk' students. "We were very flexible as far as if a child wasn't getting along in another classroom. We

were very flexible about staffing with teachers and moving him to another classroom. And sometimes, with particularly difficult kids, we did that several different times. We were hoping, for one thing, to unlock the thing that would help the child. Another thing, it was too much of a burden for that child to be in the same class because they are very distracting to other children and it's not really fair for them to have this one dysfunctional kid in their class all the time, the kind who ruined or spoiled a lot of things, so we were very flexible in that way" (Appendix B, Interview 2).

Agnes felt that teaching a split grade level, and the pressure of standardized tests were short-changing her students' learning opportunities. Merissa talked about helping several parents who had been overlooked or pushed aside by others in the school system.

The Care and Feeding of the Bureaucracy

According to Haberman, star teachers are aware of the inefficiencies and of the occasional ludicrousness of the administration in large urban school districts, but they find ways to succeed in spite of it. They are adept at learning which policies must be followed and which can be ignored.

Despite the negative press public schools often receive, Julia expresses "tremendous hope for public education." She explains how funding for school lunches, text books, Chapter One tutoring, and other programs have made a significant impact on the students she has taught over the last thirty or forty years (Appendix A, Interview 1).

All of the interviewees expressed frustration about the current trend in this state to test and retest children. They understand the need for accountability but hate to see children emotionally stressed and to have valuable learning time eaten away by weeks of

standardized testing.

Fallibility

Star teachers are willing to accept their own shortcomings. According to Haberman, stars will admit to making serious mistakes in judgement rather than just admitting to making minor mistakes such as spelling errors.

Tom was willing to share a telephone conversation in which a parent of one of his students revealed remarkable insight into the type of friction that can cause frustration between school and home. Tom was able to apply this information to many parents in similar situations and to make adjustments in his personal and professional orientation to the parents of his students. "She just said, 'I'm not educated. I didn't even finish high school. I certainly don't have any college background; I come and talk to you.' When she said 'you' she was talking about teachers. 'I come and talk to a teacher; they talk so far above my head. I have no idea what these things are. They are really not explained very thoroughly. I go home frustrated and mad. The teacher is frustrated with me, because I don't understand.' She said, 'I never have a good experience, so I don't come (to parent-teacher conferences)"...(Appendix D, Interview 1).

Agnes rationalized her choice to accept a difficult teaching assignment by saying that if anyone is going to fail these children, let it be me" (Appendix B, Interview 2). Julia and Merissa both shared examples of helping children by taking extra time to listen and care about them.

Emotional and Physical Stamina

Inner City teachers have to deal with children suffering from injury, abuse, and neglect; despite the difficulties, they are able to keep going by focusing on the good things that also happen (Haberman, 1995).

Tom speaks from personal and professional experiences when he explains that often in children's lives outside school, instinct and quick reaction are skills needed to stay safe. There is no time to think things through. When these same children come to school, we expect them to turn off their street wisdom and to think before they react. A child living with constant stress cannot simply switch out of the survival mode. It would be analogous to asking an adult to settle down and concentrate on a novel moments after a near traffic accident. Worse yet, we may be just as demanding and authoritarian as their parents may be. We talk about modeling and setting appropriate examples a lot, but we must demonstrate reasonable reactions, over and over, for children to realize that respect and reason are viable courses of action in threatening situations (Appendix C, Interview 2).

Julia said, "Come in and see the children, they are what it's all about." Merissa talked about the light of understanding in a child's face that makes it all worthwhile. Agnes talked of students she will never forget.

Organizational Ability

Due to the multiple physical and emotional demands of inner city teachers, Haberman writes that star teachers must be good managers. Each of my interviewees spoke of ways they have helped children "put away" emotions like hurt and anger, so that

they could focus on class work.

From my personal experience, management ability in unpredictable circumstances was certainly a requirement for all inner city teachers. Plans had to be flexible because they were routinely interrupted by the P. A. system, emotional outbursts, unscheduled assemblies, and other unanticipated loss of teaching time. During the two years I taught in that particular school, the incidence of crime was so high that we regularly had to scrap outdoor activity because police helicopter chases were occurring over our playground. Several times we had "lock down." Each teacher would be responsible to alert the office over the public address system that all students were present in the classrooms and that the doors and windows were locked. This prison-like condition was necessary for safety because the school was housed in two long low buildings and fugitives would occasionally duck into our building to escape the police. It didn't feel especially threatening because the fugitives were usually relatives of our children, but there was always the danger of stray bullets hitting teachers or kids.

My friend Melisa taught at an elementary a mile away from James. One morning she was on the playground when she thought she heard firecrackers. She looked around and noticed all her fourth graders were lying on the dirt yelling, "Get down, teacher!" As she did, she noticed two old, beat-up cars speeding around three sides of their playground shooting at each other, with bullets flying everywhere. She said that the most amazing part was that up to that point she imagined she was taking care of her children; from then on she also realized she also needed her children to take care of her. In the neighborhood, the children's skills far exceeded hers.

Effort-Not Ability

Haberman says that star teachers place no credence with standardized tests or "scientific" assessment. They simply accept the children in their classrooms as those who belong there, rather than saying which ones ought to be removed from their classroom and placed into special programs.

Merissa says, "We test these kids to death and the tests don't tell us anything we don't already know" (Appendix D, Interview 1). Tom tells a story of a friendless child whom he tried for a year to reach but was unsuccessful. He tells of another child that everyone else had given up on but is now heading for college (Appendix C, Written Protocol, & Interview 2). Julia, currently teaching in a Chapter One enrichment program, exhibits high expectations for each of her students. Agnes struggles with the demands of teaching a split grade level but also expresses frustration with special education programs for not serving her students more of the time.

Teaching-Not Sorting

Readiness tests are designed to screen out those children not yet ready to benefit from school programs, but Haberman asks, "Aren't those lacking skills the ones who would benefit most from being included in the programs rather than being excluded for lack of maturity or readiness" (1995)?

Merissa speaks of children failing regular classrooms and being referred to special education classes when there is nothing physically or mentally wrong with them. They have simply never been shown the basic skills of how to hold a pencil or crayon or how to use scissors or recite a nursery rhyme. They end up playing catch-up their entire lives.

"A good teacher has to be able to teach all the children in his or her class, from the ones who are reading to those who are just learning letter names and sounds" (Appendix D, Interview 1). Tom speaks of finding the greatest needs each day and meeting those needs before proceeding to the regularly scheduled events. Julia made time to talk with her student, Marlena, regularly during her planning time and even took a few minutes for her during our interview. Agnes tries to find the academic strengths and needs of each child, even in a highly mobile population.

Convincing Students, "I Need You Here"

Haberman writes that stars are able to convince students that, "We couldn't do it without you" (1995).

My second interview with Julia was interrupted by a little girl who came in to work on her own. Julia described her as a "heroic child," one who would not be ignored, yet it was Julia's room where she found that extra support she needed (Appendix B, Interview 2). My friend Jon, who teaches in New York City has a group of inner city kids excited about doing chemistry by transforming his classroom into a forensics lab where students learn chemistry through setting up crime scenes in remote corners of the rambling old high school, then dusting for fingerprints and typing blood to solve the crime.

You and Me Against the Material

Haberman says that star teachers form a sort of camaraderie with their students, united against the curriculum to be tackled (1995).

Tom described how traditional classrooms often used computer time as a reward for those who finished their work early. That left many "At-Risk" children in a catch twenty-two. They were the ones who didn't have computers to work on at home, and they were not going to be the first to complete their seatwork. Tom was able then to work with a program that made technology accessible to "At-Risk" students throughout the day in the regular classroom and in a computer lab with a teacher specializing in computer instruction. The access to technology not only enhanced learning by helping the children to improve their skills but it also "made them excited about school. It made them want to be there" (Appendix C, Interview 1).

Gentle Teaching in a Violent Society

In the nation's 120 largest school districts, 25% of youth have witnessed murder, and 72% know someone who has been shot, (Wilson-Brewer et. Al. 1992). As quoted by Haberman (1995) according to NEA (1993) 900 teachers are threatened with bodily harm everyday in the US (Haberman 1995).

Responding to a question about working with the children of incarcerated parents, Julia responded, "Same way all of us do, with love and understanding and just knowing that's part of society and this is a multi-faceted profession. You are going to be exposed to many children. It's a tough job, but those things happen in our society; if you read about it in the paper, it's happening in a classroom. Whatever you've read in the paper, some child's going to school from that situation today. Somewhere, whether it's a brother, a grandparent, or a brother-in-law, families are hurting. Children in classrooms are hurting" (Appendix A, Interview 1).

Face Themselves

Rather than pretending all children are the same, Haberman's star teachers ask themselves: What are my prejudices? Where did they come from? What am I doing about them? (1995).

Tom reveals that he was pretty naive before he started teaching in inner city schools. "I saw third graders who flashed gang signs, who used (sexually explicit) language." Tom was shocked at first then angered that children had to live in such rough situations. He felt sorry for the children. After a few years he came to realize that "my job was to help them work with what they had to create something better for the future as opposed to feeling sorry for them, because they didn't want that. At first, I thought that was what they needed, that was what they wanted...kids who knew gang signs when they were six and seven years old. Who took care of younger siblings. They were responsible for washing their own clothes, for feeding themselves; they had such a high level of responsibility...We forget that because they come to school at such a low academic level, we think, we tend to get the idea, What do they know? They know a lot, they are caring for themselves, they are caring for others, and they're so responsible at such a young age that I personally believe...they can only take on so much new information" (Appendix D, Interview 1).

What Stars Don't Do

Discipline

Haberman has found that stars do not spend much time on discipline. They have few rules because they anticipate the handicapping conditions of poverty, violence, and substance and physical abuse. They have realistic expectations for their students. They have a proactive style and anticipate a range of achievement and behaviors (1995).

Tom writes that his university coursework taught him to write a beautiful lesson plan but failed to teach him how to model reasonable behaviors in unreasonable situations and to teach children to understand respect (Appendix D, Interview 2).

Punishment

"Stars do not think in terms of punishment. They enjoy being happy for and with youngsters. When punishments are used the same youngsters are punished most and few are transformed" (Wilson-Brewer, Cohen, O'Donnell, & Goodman, 1992) as quoted by (Haberman, 1995).

Merissa expressed concern over children who are punished for behaviors before the reasons for the behaviors are sought. She tells the story of a child whose foster mother says, "He just won't do any work." The foster mother hadn't discovered that the child could not read. The same little boy was denied further visits with his brothers because they fought when they were reunited. The deeper implications were not explored; the decision to not allow reunions was based on the surface reaction. I have known Merissa to be a loving and gentle teacher, paradoxically, she is tough on her

students and wants to teach them to be survivors. She speaks of not letting children "get away" with not doing their work and children who need someone to "ride them, or put their thumb on them." Although these are words used by behaviorists and proponents of "tough love," Merissa speaks as one who is battle-weary of seeing children slip though the cracks and is unwilling to allow children to self destruct (Appendix D, Interview 2).

Tests and Grading

Haberman's stars spend as little time as possible on testing and grading. They place emphasis on effort (1995).

Each respondent felt frustrated by the amount of emphasis currently being placed on testing young children. Agnes describes standardized testing as a waste of her teaching time. It dictates an amount of material to be covered in a grade level year, but because the test is taken in March, she has to have covered the curriculum that was written to be taught through May. She said the test may or may not reflect what children know, and the children waste a lot of energy stressing over the tests. She uses a computer reading test program as part of her reading program, but she emphasizes improvement over actual points (Appendix A, Interview 2).

Time-on-Task

Stars do not use much direct instruction, therefore they have little use for "time-on-task" as it relates to seat work and drills (1995).

Julia said "I've watched the curriculum being pushed down and down. And I see it with my grandkids; things they're expected to do when they should have spent more

time on developmental tasks. Then we're having kids come up LD and ADHD where if we had taken them slowly, developmentally, by the time they reach third grade, they would be a whole lot better off to learn the tougher skills! But we pushed it down, now the cursive in the second grade." Each of my respondents have, or have had, classrooms that reflect their students lives and interests, rather than rote memorization and skill and drill assignments. Merissa spoke of children needing to be "on task" (Appendix D, Interview 2).

Rewards and Reinforcement

Stars do not use rewards and punishment to alter behavior. They seek intrinsic motivation rather than using behaviorism. They do give presents, usually to encourage a particular child's interest or to fill a need, but they do not use gifts to control behavior (1995).

Tom found his students in need of "silver boxes," not as coercion or to elicit desired behavior, but just to show that someone cared about them. They might be tangible objects, or they might just be encouragement which he thought of as little silver presents tied up with a big silver bow on top (Appendix C, Interview 1). Some of my respondents speak in behavioristic terms, which may be a product of their own educational experiences.

Homework

Stars assign homework that can be completed independently rather than assuming someone at home will be able to help the child. They make assignments meaningful and

relevant and do not check homework but rather share results with the group (1995).

Merissa expressed frustration that many teachers fail to understand that children of poverty do not have a computer to complete homework assignments. They may not even have a pencil or paper in their house. They also may not have time, because of other responsibilities, to spend hours on homework (Appendix D, Interview 1). Tom said the work they do at home is their homework (Appendix C, Interview 2).

Parent Bashing

Stars see parents as partners and do not parent bash or blame parents for their student's difficulties, according to Haberman (1995).

Each of my respondents showed great empathy for parents and families throughout their interviews and written protocols. Tom, Agnes, and Merissa speak of parents whose school experiences were so negative that they cannot imagine their children experiencing success in school. They don't attend conferences or think positively about their child's school because they have not felt welcome there.

Emergent Themes

Each interview was audio-tape recorded and transcribed. I listened to each tape a second time, reading along with the transcription, and then a third time with just the audio, making notes of pauses, inflections, and remembering non-verbal gestures from the interviews. I then read each transcript as a whole, looking for overarching ideas. I asked myself, "What does this person seem to be saying here? What are they not

saying?" I then analyzed each transcript, color-coding line by line and wrote the main ideas of the conversation in the margin. I looked at the whole of the data for themes unique to individuals and for themes that were consistent across the respondents. I then physically cut apart each interview and written protocol and sorted by individual theme. Because issues of teaching in inner city schools are not clearly separable, definable entities but interwoven, overlapping, and complex, I struggled a great deal with the stratification process and started over many times.

After color coding the transcribed interviews and cutting them apart, I sorted the themes into piles by frequency of topic, without controlling for a particular theme appearing in each of the four interviews. Because Merissa and Tom's interviews lasted longer, more data was contained in their interviews, and their comments appear more frequently in this chapter. I determined essential themes as those that seemed to representative of the essence of inner city teaching, regardless of whether they appeared in one or more interviews. I determined unique themes as those that had a strong influence on an individual, and may or may not have influenced other teachers, but were not a universal experience of inner city teachers.

I regrouped individual themes into six overarching categories of theme, adjusting categories as needed. van Manen (1990) describes theme as the "needfulness or desire to make sense." It involves being open to meaning and the process of insight. Essential themes, according to van Manen, are those themes whose absence would change the fundamental meaning of the phenomenon. Incidental themes are nonessential to a phenomenon's existence, yet bring a richness of texture. I interpreted five essential categories of theme that seemed to make the most sense to me:

Middle Class Assumptions, Changing Families, Changes in Childhood, Through the Eyes of a Child, and nonessential, yet valuable unique themes of **Personal Experience**. The sixth and final category delineates the essential theme of a **Vision for the Future**.

I began with general difficulties in teaching in inner city classrooms that involve inner city teachers' struggle with middle class assumptions for the teaching and learning of all children, despite their socioeconomic level and changing family structures and expectations for families. Under **Middle Class Assumptions** are grouped more specific themes of *Expected Experiences*, *Clash of Values*, and *Street Wisdom.* Under **Changing Families** are issues of *Cultural Awareness, Absent Parents, and Parenting Skills.*

This broader view coalesces naturally into themes involving **Changes in Childhood** and **Through the Eyes of a Child**. Under **Changes in Childhood** are specific themes of *Loss of Security, School's Readiness,* and *Medicated Children.* Through the **Eyes of a Child** is divided into *Teaching Individuals, Heroic Children,* and *Responding to Stressors.*

I also noted themes related to **Personal Experience** and a **Vision for the Future**. Under **Personal Themes** are *History, Hope, and Efficacy.* **Vision for the Future** includes *A Vision for Families, A Vision for Classrooms, and A Vision for Teacher Preparation.*

I will describe each theme as it was shared in the interviews and through my own experiences and those of other inner city teachers. Each theme is supported by the sub themes in the following section. In the literature and in my experience, a major difficulty in successful inner city teaching is overcoming the idea that "teaching is teaching," and that all teaching situations are basically the same.

Middle Class Assumptions

Each respondent shared stories related to prevalent assumptions that children are all like white middle class children and, therefore, schooling can be the same for all. This assumption fails to take into account a child's culture, experiences, and differences in what children and teachers regard as the "right" thing to do, and devalues the vast body of knowledge that children must master in order to survive in their neighborhoods, schools, and homes. Middle class assumptions also make teachers' jobs more difficult because the public assumes that "real" inner city teaching doesn't exist in the Midwest or Southwest. Teachers in St. Louis, Cincinnati, or San Antonio, for example, are not given the understanding and support of "those brave souls" teaching in New York City or Los Angeles. Yet there are real differences in teaching classes where the majority of children have suffered from exposure to violence, poor nutrition, language delay, and a host of other factors that affect most children in inner city schools. There are emotional as well as physical demands on these teachers.

I asked Tom to compare his inner city students with the rural middle class children he works with today. "I have noticed a difference in the cleanliness. These other kids may have been doing their own laundry, which probably meant they weren't doing it very often, or even if the parents were doing it, they didn't have time. It seems like these kids come more prepared for school. In our magnet program we had a little case with toothbrush and comb for every student and toothpaste. And sometimes half of them would go in and brush their teeth and comb their hair because it just didn't take

place at home. Well, we don't do that here. It became so natural with us before, 'Here's your stuff, go down to the bathroom.' Lice were much more prevalent there. It was just a constant. It was never really a time when we didn't have some kind of lice epidemic going on. There was always a high incidence of scabies, and, to my knowledge, I don't think we've had any case of that here" (Appendix C, Interview 1).

Expected Experiences

It is not unusual for middle class children to be taught the names of colors, numbers, and alphabet letters from the time they begin to talk. Children whose home life is permeated by the daily struggle to survive are not always afforded such luxury. Merissa pointed out that, as preservice teachers, "You assume that everyone comes to school knowing their name, their address, their birth date, knowing the letters of the alphabet. You assume they can hold a pencil" (Appendix D, interview #1). Merissa also explained that although children are aware of their body parts, utensils, and other objects, they often have never been made aware of the names for them. She said starting the kindergarten year is like buying a used car; you never know what to expect until you start driving.

Merissa reminded me of a child who came to my own kindergarten classroom knowing only her nickname, Sugar, and having never heard her given name, which appeared on my roll sheet. As you can imagine, it was very upsetting to the child to be new in school with this strange white lady called "Teacher" who kept calling her Tanisha. I was left wondering if there was something wrong with her hearing because she never

answered. Tanisha's story is just one example of the tremendous need for understanding between home and school.

Merissa pointed out that inner city teachers need to be able to meet all children's needs, including those who may have lived in other countries and may be more of an expert than the teacher in some areas (Appendix D, Interview 1).

University Teacher Preparation usually includes courses in Classroom Management. Tom explained that classroom management is not all discipline. Classroom management is "How am I going to manage to deal with these students today?" Tom feels that a lot more needs to be taught, and teachers have to be careful about their own assumptions. "Assuming that a child has eaten today. Assuming that he's slept at night. Assuming that his parents were at home at all last night. Assuming he was even home. That he wasn't involved in some type of drug activity. We suppose parents made them go to bed at nine o'clock so they would be well rested for school. We need to be taught not to make all those assumptions and that there are some things we can do to deal with situations as they are, not just live with them. We deal with a lot, but I think the university could help teachers learn to make bad situations better" (Appendix C, Interview 1).

Clash of Values

Most teachers are from middle class backgrounds and have to think carefully about their response when a child shares parts of his or her life-world that are in conflict with the teacher's value system. For example, one of my friend Georgia's kindergartners confided, "We take the dogs when we go rob houses." How does a thoughtful teacher

express concern for a child's safety without communicating disapproval of the family's means of livelihood or making the child feel unacceptable because his or her family values are in conflict with the institutionalized values of the school and the personal values of the teacher? Tom shared an experience in which his value system was clearly in conflict with that of the neighborhood.

> ". . . because my students didn't get on a bus, they walked home. Well, we had several junior high students who'd get off on a bus stop near our school and hang out across the street. Our kids would get out of school, walk across the street, and the older kids would beat them up. So one thing I found myself doing every day was walking these kids home. And there were five of six kids that we'd walk down the street. We'd just walk them home, because, otherwise, they were just going to get nailed every day. And they appreciated it. However, many people along the way, many parents included, were upset by my presence in the neighborhood. It really was not a, it had nothing to do with my race. It was just that that I was not from that area. My value system was different, and they were well aware of it. And teachers were, often times, more of an enemy than a support system. Not on purpose, but it just tended to happen sometimes. So my presence, just walking down the street, angered some parents. It really angered the kids who wanted to beat the little kids up. I think I was considered an outsider . . . As a matter of fact, one of the parents who got really angry with me, it was the parent of one of the kids that I walked home everyday, and her particular problem was a racial problem. She told

> me she didn't want a "whitey" walking her son home everyday. And, I mean, there's not a response to that. At that point, I'm not going to get into it. This boy is, He's in need of somebody to take care of him. And that parent's perspective, as I began to think about it, to look on the other side, was, "If he's going to survive, then probably the last thing he needs is to have his teacher walk him home. But to get beat up, get a few slugs in, gain a little respect . . ." (Appendix C, interview 1).

Tom expressed awareness that some parents are distrustful of teachers because of class issues. Most inner city parents are not well educated and often do not equate school with positive experiences. Other parents are keenly aware of race, especially in white teachers working in non-white neighborhoods. Tom also felt his gender caused feelings of distrust and fear among some parents and children.

> "I realized that as much as I wanted it to change, my purpose couldn't be to change that student or to necessarily even change the situation they were in. I felt like my job was to do what I thought was best, and sometimes that was a different ethic than they had at home, talk to them about why I feel like it should be that way. You know stealing was nothing to many of them. However, if they had something stolen, it became something different. We had to do a lot of role playing. The only thing I can do is to show them why I believe that that value system may be a little distorted, without actually saying, 'That's stupid.' 'Don't be that way.' Because then I've done nothing but say, 'You're a bad person. Everything about your situation is bad.' Then I have excluded that

student. I learned that even though my value system was different from the one being taught in their home, I could not exclude them in the process of teaching them what was right. That was quite a challenge" (Appendix C, Interview 1).

Street Wisdom

Tom was unprepared for the level of social sophistication he found in inner city youth.

"I grew up in a small town school, and I didn't experience knowledge of many street things until I was much older, and a lot of that I didn't know at all. Then I started teaching in this inner city school, and I saw third graders who flashed gang signs, who would say phrases that I would have no idea what they meant. I would find out, after investigation, that they were things that only someone very streetwise would know. Those things shocked me the first couple of years.

After that, I realized this was their life. I also had to realize this angered me, not the students, but just that they had to be in this situation. I felt sorry for them. Then I realized, after a couple of years, that my job was to help them work with what they had to create something better in the future, as opposed to feeling sorry for them. They didn't want that. At first I thought 'that's what they need, that's what they want,' but it wasn't. These kids knew gang signs when they were six and seven years old. They took care of younger siblings. They were responsible for

> washing their own clothes, for feeding themselves; they had such a high level of responsibility. Often times we forget that because they come to school at such a low academic level. We tend to get the idea, 'What do they know?' They know a lot. They are caring for themselves, they are caring for others, and they're so responsible at such a young age that I personally believe that it's part of their academic problem. Their brain can only hold so much at a time, can only take on so much new information" (Appendix C, Interview 1).

Tom was surprised that such young children were not protected from adult situations.

> "They knew about things like sex. They knew explicitly what it was about, not necessarily what it's about, well what I believe it's about...They knew the process. They had seen it. Some of them had experienced it, which was a shocking situation to me, especially when you talk about third grade. They were streetwise in the sense that they knew about and had taken certain types of drugs. My eyes were opened to realize these things were happening in their homes. Their parents may have allowed them to join in. It was typically not behind anyone's back. They knew about prostitution, they knew all about it. Many of them had siblings that were involved with that. Some of them had visions of becoming a prostitute."

Tom compared the reaction of the sixth graders at his current school with that of the inner city third-graders to a visit to the county jail. "We wanted them to see some

consequences. The third-graders were never scared, seldom ever shocked, and every single time we went, two or three kids had relatives they were talking to. 'Hey Uncle Bob,' or whatever. The suburban sixth graders were absolutely shocked and petrified. They squeezed up against the walls and were emotionally drained when they left. Some of them cried. My mentality was Hey I've been with third-graders, surely sixth-graders can handle it. I'd think, Why are they crying? It was because I'd been there seven times and I knew what it was. These suburban kids were just really naïve in comparison" (Appendix C, Interview 1).

Changing Families

It is a common assumption that most families have a house or apartment to call their own and that most children live with at least one parent consistently. Such is not the norm for many inner city children. Agnes said, "I had a boy last year whose mom lived in a hotel. She was a stripper, and there were four kids living in a hotel room. She had different men in and out. (The kids) got taken away from her . . .he was moved to a foster home a week later, and he was gone. I have no idea what happened to him. He got split from his brother. When there are a lot of kids in the family, they don't go to the same foster home. That's got to be really hard on them. It's all they're thinking about" (Appendix A, interview 1).

Merissa told the story of a little girl who stopped talking after her father tried to drown her in the bathtub at age two. Merissa then talked about a class trip to Disney on Ice, during which this mother said she knew that she shouldn't be with some of the men

she dated but she felt that she had to have someone around. Years later, her mother was jailed for hiring someone to kill her boyfriend. She still worries about what has happened to the little girl (Appendix D, Interview 2).

Children not only have to find ways of coping with parents who may be abusive or neglectful, they may also face uncertainty of where they will sleep each night, which school attendance area they will be staying in, and who they will call teacher from day to day. I recall when I had 100% turnover in my classroom between December and May of 1988. I had twenty eight to thirty children at all times, but each of them moved into my classroom as others moved away. Some children had attended seven different kindergarten classrooms. How does one deal with such issues as attachment, continuity of curriculum, trust, and classroom community?

Tom said, "Especially when it may be a student who has just rented a house there for a month because rent was due somewhere else. They just kind of hop around town, you know, because it was less expensive that way. You may think, 'Okay, I've got a month with this child. What change am I going to make? What environment am I going to create for them in the next thirty days? Is it going to be worthwhile?" Tom came to realize, "Yes, I want to make it worthwhile. No matter how long they are here I want them to be safe in my classroom" (Appendix C, Interview 2).

Cultural Awareness

Tom talked about being unprepared to teach inner city children. As an undergraduate,

> "I learned all kinds of wonderful Language Arts, Science, Math,

and Reading ideas and how you can do these things differently. I learned nothing about going into different cultures, and I mean just different American cultures. I'm talking about just walking into a classroom in an inner city school. To these kids, it was foreign, and they looked at me like I was kind of crazy. If I had some kind of idea of how to try to meet some needs first, then I could use all that wonderful information about subject matter. Subject matter, when you consider the full day of school, it's just a portion. I don't want to say a small portion, but if I haven't done everything I'm supposed to do beforehand, like meeting those needs, then it becomes a very small portion, and I'm cramming something down their throat that they could care less about."

"I grew up in a poor home, so I did know about poverty, but it was in a small town, it was a situation, many people did know that my dad was an alcoholic. They did know our family couldn't get any extras that we wore our jeans longer than anybody else did and the holes would get really big. So I was used to people knowing things like that. But even in that setting, I did not go to an inner city school. I didn't have to survive like these kids do. I was on free and reduced lunch. I did often get my only meal at school, but I didn't have to survive the gang situation. I didn't have to survive the street talk. In college, I wasn't taught to back up and say, "What is the greatest need today of this kid," and try to meet it so that I can move on to instructional matters. In the case of the student who was getting beat up, I had to look back and realize why his mom wanted me to

let him walk home. I didn't know that on my own. You can't teach every value system because they are as vast as there are people, but there are ideals within an inner city school" (Appendix C, interview 1).

Merissa reflected that her ideas about cultural education sometimes conflicted with other educators of her race. "For Black history month, I do a panel of black people, men and women in jobs you wouldn't think they would have. I try to find them in this city. Another black teacher took another approach. He had white kids dressed in paper skirts, running down the aisle with these big spears singing from Africa to the United States. I'm like, 'I don't think so, (laugh) there is something wrong with this picture.' And parents were very upset, angry to see their kids dressed like that. Boys without shirts and girls in little skirts they had made out of paper, running up and down, and the girls singing these little African songs. That is not about African History for me. I think we need to focus more on what has happened. What changes are taking place because of that history. A lot of blacks don't know that history (Appendix D, Interview 1).

"We have recognized blended family culture. We have recognized mixed race children. Now we need to recognize the ones that are non-English speaking. How do you teach that child? When you walk out with your degree, you are so excited, and then you find three kids that don't speak English in your first grade classroom? Teachers need to be trained to deal with that. This district has instituted a summer program that lasts for two weeks, and teachers are trained in the different cultures. They bring in students for a week. Students that would benefit from this program would go back to their own school to help with a program of breaking language barriers and cultural barriers. It's an excellent program. Kids help teachers and the other students in the classroom by learning

the other kids culture. We have a lot of Vietnamese and Hispanics. We have a lot of Caucasian kids that don't have a clue what their holidays are, what this tradition means to them, why they don't do what we do, you know, the way we handle things. If you bring them in and make them aware of that culture, then it's a lot easier for peers to say 'Oh, you know why they're doing that, let me tell you... Well, let me tell you why they're doing it this way.' They're bringing teachers and children during the summer and they're paying for it" (Appendix D, Interview 1).

Merissa also shared a story of a Hispanic child who simply refused to work in the classroom. She would just play with her pencil and notebook. Her regular teacher referred her to special education, believing she did not understand the first-grade assignments. Merissa found that she was quite bright and capable. She had just gotten into a habit of not working and getting away with it because she was so cute (Appendix D, Interview 2).

Absent Parents

When parents are unavailable to parent due to substance addiction, incarceration, or other reasons, grandparents often step in. I've known single grandparents who are raising five or six grandchildren, sometimes even great-grandchildren, in a trailer house or small apartment. Merissa remembered a school in which "We had third generation raising the kids because the moms and dads weren't there. It was the grandparents, and the grandparents were illiterate, too" (Appendix D, interview 1).

Merissa further explained, "A lot of grandmothers . . . the ones who are supposed to be the grandmothers are still in the street, because the children are so young that had

the kids. You see, before you had this grandmother saying, 'I'm going to stay here and help you raise these kids, because if I help you, then you'll be on your own. I won't have to take care of you all your life. If I can help you get your job established.' That network is not there. Its not there like it used to be. There are grandparents in place, but some of the grandparents here are very young. I believe that's part of our dilemma. At another school where I worked, those grandparents were older, took care of them, raised them, their grandkids are my kids' age. It's like me being a grandmother (laugh). I don't have time for that" (Appendix D, Interview 2).

When grandparents are not available, children will be cared for by the state and be placed in foster care through the Department of Human Services, or informal arrangements may be made with neighbors or friends. Agnes shared a story of an abusive informal foster care arrangement while a mother was incarcerated. "They may be living with someone who may or may not be a relative. This one particular boy was living with his mother's best friend and her boyfriend. It was a very bad situation . . .She thought discipline meant swatting him on the legs and berating him in front of the kids" (Appendix B, Interview 1).

Merissa said, "We see kids that nobody is raising. That's what's happening here. Nobody's raising the kids. That's depressing." Merissa asked DHS about some former students and was put in contact with their current foster parents. They were worried that he was getting in trouble on the school bus. They didn't know he had never ridden a bus before. "And that to me is the negative side of foster parenting. They had no clue he was retarded. They had no idea what this child's background was. She said they tried to have a reunion, and the three brothers were so violent at the reunion that they had to leave. I

said, 'You snatched three boys away from each other, and the oldest boy was always the defender and took care of everybody. Since he was about five or six all he remembers is taking care of the boys. And you have to understand, when they get together, he still wants to do that.' It's like the foster kids have no life, it just started when they walked in the door...No it didn't, and that's why I called that foster mother and I said, You have to understand he has been there for his brothers and he is concerned for them" (Appendix D, interview 2).

Although it sounds odd that acquaintances would take over the raising of someone else's child, I remember a grandmother who told me through her tears that her thirty-five year-old daughter had just called to announce that she was moving to Texas with her seventeen year-old boyfriend. Because he didn't like kids, would the grandmother call DHS to come get her girls (ages four and six)? I told the grandmother, who was crippled with arthritis, that if she couldn't take care of the children, I would certainly do it rather than turn them over to the child welfare system. It turned out that the mother had a fight with her boyfriend and decided to stay.

Agnes has worked with children to get them caught up with the rest of the class, just to have them moved out of her class and into a foster home in a different district. "They don't trust anybody, because they don't know when they'll be moved again" (Appendix C, Interview 1).

Parenting Skills

"Typically, parents would not want to be involved in school because they were dealing with negatives, meaning the teacher calling and saying, "Well, your child got in

trouble today for this, or they're failing this." It was always a negative, it seemed like to them, from the school, so they just chose not to participate at all. Just, if I don't have to see it, hear it, talk about it, then it's just not there" (Appendix C, Interview 1).

Merissa talked about a single mother who finally was able to tell her "No, I really, I just can't read, and people think I don't want to help my kids." Merissa went to visit the mother at a grocery store where she worked. DHS had taken custody of her sons after one of them had been bitten by a rat. "The mom said, 'I just want to get my boys back. I have to do it. I don't know how to do it. They say I don't know how to be a good parent.' And talking with her, I let her know that parenting is something you can learn. She didn't understand that. She was living with a guy, but he eventually stopped living with the family. He was good for the oldest boy, because he would take Deonte to work with him. The guy worked on houses as a handyman, and Deonte would write about it in his journal. He would tell me how they would go and use a saw, and he couldn't do this, and he couldn't do that, but there were things he could do to help. So, I figured this is good. He needs somebody to help him. Then the man worked on the rent house they were living in. It was rat infested. The landlord wouldn't come and clean it out. So he came and was putting up boards. Deonte said he put up boards all around our room after that happened. I imagine there were holes in the walls. It was sad. The boys were taken into foster care, and I would really like to know where they are now." Merissa talked about young single mothers who want to have social lives, and their sons who feel like their mothers no longer have time for them. She has counseled mothers not to let men move in, so the children can see that their mother still has time to spend with them (Appendix D Interview 2).

Changes in Childhood

Loss of Security

Agnes said, "I have some kids that come to school wondering if they're going to have dinner that night. They don't know if their mom's coming home at night. They don't know if they're going to have a place to sleep when they get home because some of them have gone home and found their stuff out on the front yard...The parents didn't have a good school life themselves, and they don't expect their kids to have one" (Appendix B, Interview 1).

Tom said, "I feel like the kids that are in the lower socioeconomic group have stresses just beyond our comprehension sometimes. When school is out, their responsibilities become so great, whether it's being the mommy or daddy to younger siblings, or just being alone, knowing the parents aren't going to be there to take care of them, and living in neighborhoods that are scary. They're stressed about crime in their area and wondering, 'Is something going to happen to me?' Seeing a lot of relatives go to jail or bad things happening to them, and parents expressing their own stresses about not being able to pay bills and things like that. Kids take those things on, the responsibility of washing their own clothes, not to say responsibility is a bad thing, but when it's piled on, I think the stresses overwhelm them.

"Typically mom or dad is just really working hard to try to make ends meet, and

maybe the alimony's not coming, and the child support's not coming, and even when it is, it's still tough to make it and the kids recognize it. I do believe all kids are going to school with more stress than they did when I was a kid; however I think back to kids who were children of the depression, and I see what they went through, and I think there's a lot of comparison. We're not going through a depression, but we are going through an emotional depression, of sorts. I think there's a lot of equal stresses" (Appendix C, Interview 2).

Schools' Readiness?

The first of the Six National Goals (Bayh,1995) states that all children in America will come to school ready to learn by the year 2000. I wonder if the schools are ready for all the children. Are they ready to accept children as they are and help them reach their individual potential, or are they only interested in standard deviations and collective nouns describing populations of children? It's almost like the children of the growing poverty and minority rates are taunting the lawmakers, "Ready or not! Here we come!"

Tom has noticed a lack of real counseling services in schools. "I don't think we give them as many opportunities as they really need. We say that we offer counseling at school, but how much of that is just us talking to them about what they should and shouldn't do? The wonderful group counseling that offers all these wonderful ideas and options for them to do but it still isn't counseling. It's just another teaching environment. It's not really allowing open expression, and sometimes I think teachers are scared of finding out too much because 'If I find out too much, I've got to do something about it.' I

don't think we do it on purpose. Sometimes the more we find out, the more we have to get involved, the more we need to do something, the more we don't know what to do, and so it's a difficult situation to be in. All the kid reads into that is either 'They don't care' or 'They can't solve my problem,' or 'We don't do that at school, you know, we learn math and reading here.'" Tom finds it frustrating that when we talk about standards of excellence, we don't take into account the emotional side of students' lives, and the fact that they may be using all of their energy on survival right now. He says, "Typically, teachers put them on their 'bad kid' list. People say there's not really a bad kid list. Well there is a bad kid list, and teachers will kind of place them there in their mind. The expectation changes. I still want them to succeed, and I still want them to meet a high standard. But we have to make them feel safe, make them feel secure. We cannot change a lot at home, many times, but we can change the school environment, and we can take them beyond survival for the time that they're right here" (Appendix C, Interview 2).

Tom also remembers teaching a single grade level, with students whose ages covered a five-year span. "Well, they were in third grade, but during my time there I had a student as young as seven, because he had started school overseas in a DODS (Department of Defense Schools) program and had started school early, very early. He turned eight shortly after he started third grade, but I did have him at seven. And then I had students as old as thirteen. And that, he had been in another school system and had failed at least twice. And so he was thirteen years old and still in third grade" (Appendix C, Interview 1).

Merissa talks about the school structure of afternoon kindergarten that puts additional stress on students. "I used to say, 'I might as well not teach in the afternoons.'

They may have been in an air-conditioned building all morning and they come to your room where there is no air. About 1:15 p.m. their little body is asleep; they're melting. Now how do you teach that? That was the most disappointing thing, was to try to teach that afternoon class, and they did get shafted because they couldn't function. I used to try to overload my mornings classes. Then they have the holidays to mess with in the afternoon" (Appendix D, Interview 1).

Merissa also discussed how special needs children are affected by school bureaucracy. "Half the time you forget the PE teacher on your IEP, if a kid has a medical problem, before a teacher starts saying, 'Come on lazy', 'Come on Mr. Turtle Man, get on it', that that child can't do any better, they're in physical therapy. The art teacher needs to know, because they're going to all those pull-out programs (Appendix D, Interview 1).

Julia has also felt effects of standardized testing. "Well, I think some of the tests are way too hard. I think sometimes they don't reflect what... I realize that the test people who have made the test are from this state, but when I began teaching third grade again, after having taught junior high, I was shocked at what we expected third graders to know. Many times they were not developmentally ready for it, and that's a terrible thing. But accountability is good. We look at the teachers, we look at the kids, let's start looking at the tests. Let's start looking at the tests and seeing what those questions are. Because some of them are just very hard for me to do, and I consider myself to be a well educated person. They are not always only judging content, they are judging your ability to read obscure material! I don't think that's fair" (Appendix A, Interview 2).

Agnes discusses other stresses caused by changing the structuring of classes.

"Ever since this school's been here, there's been a new class created after the beginning of the school year, because we don't know how the population's going to go. We set up the classes we think there will be. Then, if we have an overwhelming number of fourth graders, then we have to get a new teacher. Most schools have this problem in this city because the kids move so much. Either because of military or because of rent, or because they're unhappy with the school they're in, there's a lot of different reasons. It's a very mobile population. Last year we had about 650 kids, 300 of them came after December. We had the same number all year, but we lost half of our population by Christmas. And obviously a whole new group came after Christmas. And most of them were not military. I don't know where those kids came from! Sometimes it's divorce, children going to live with the other parent, moving to be closer to family. Some of them are moving to get away from family" (Appendix B, Interview 2).

Medicated Children

Julia said, "At first I thought we were over medicating, then I saw a special on ADD and ADHD on one of the educational channels. Then I began to realize that was not my decision to make. And that the implication of a child not being on medication when he needed to be on medication was that he was missing so much education. Missing all social interaction. Then I said to myself, 'You know, that's an important thing.' Many of the people who are in prison today, had they had some kind of a medication that would have allowed them to attend better to what was going on in the early grades, would not have fallen so far behind in school. So where does it begin and where does it end? Is it a circle that goes round and round? And if a doctor says a

child's got a disability and needs that medication, then who am I to question it? I certainly see the difference in children who are on medication as far as their ability to learn in school. Also think that sometimes the children with certain learning styles that are different than those learning styles that are usually addressed by schools may be diagnosed as having hyperactivity thing when it's just really they need to be in a classroom where they have more hands on, more times to get up, more breaks, more things done that fit them. And most kids really don't have a learning personality where they can sit and learn from worksheets and sit still all day. Most of us don't have that kind of learning style (Appendix A, Interview 2).

Tom felt that "We don't know how to deal with children's behaviors sometimes, so we'll say, Well, they need medicine or something. I think we put a lot of kids on medicine that don't really need it. But there are some that really do need the medicine. I can think of one student who was, he was a very sweet boy. He was from a family of poverty but with good parents. They really wanted to work with him and work with the school, but when he did not have his medicine, he had a different look in his eye. He was totally out of control. He would harm other students, even his friends, his closest friends. He didn't even like his behavior when he was not on his medicine, so that was probably my first experience of seeing a student that really needed that medication. That was good for him" (Appendix C, Interview 2).

Merissa remembers an overmedicated child "When this child came to me, he was a disaster case. They drugged him. He was on two tranquilizers and Ritalin. Now we want this child to function? Well, the doctor had given him the medication because the mother kept calling the doctor saying, 'The teacher said he wouldn't sit still, and the

teacher said he bothered everybody.' Now that he's on just the Ritalin, I've had him two years, and he's reading, he's doing his math. It has helped him. I've seen him off it lately, and he is a child that needs some help keeping himself focused and keeping himself on task. I still really believe that if this mother had known how to handle him, he wouldn't need the medication. Now she's pregnant. But he is doing really well. And after you visit with a parent and you hear them talking, you see that the child is a miniature parent. If that parent is in disarray, is not sure where the car keys are, and 'I'm just so busy, what do we expect from the child?" (Appendix D, Interview 1).

Through the Eyes of a Child

Teaching Individuals

Tom recognizes that just because children are in a classroom, they may have widely varying abilities. He asks, "What do you do when most of your students are below grade level? How are you going to teach? Are you going ahead to teach the third grade objectives? Are you going to meet individual needs? How? That's another thing, the university addresses how to meet classroom needs but doesn't focus on how to meet individual needs. Physical needs, I think by the time they progressed, even only two or three grades, the teacher was teaching often times a level where they 'should be' instead of where they actually were, so they were just continually getting further behind, more lost. One thing they just thought was wonderful was to find out we could back up and find out specifically where that student's needs began and just start teaching at that point. That was probably the best thing we could possibly do. Just because they felt like it was

over their head, everything was over their head." Tom went on to talk about finding the things kids were experts at, things not usually addressed at school, and creating opportunities for children to share their skills, such as an ironing demonstration lesson taught by a third grader who was very good at ironing clothes (Appendix C, Interview 1).

Merissa said, "When you've got all these inner city kids, we need to cater to how they learn. We want teach them all the same way, but they have learning preferences that need to be addressed in our teaching style. It's not happening, it's not working, and we are losing our kids" (Appendix D, Interview 1).

Heroic Children

Julia remembers teaching in past decades. "I remember heroic children, children who came to school when most adults I know couldn't have had the courage to do so. My memories reach back into the fifties, so we're talking when there was no free and reduced lunch, no welfare as we know it, no unemployment compensation. It was a desperate era for a lot of children. They were hungry, and they didn't even have enough money to pay the three cents for the milk we had as a treat. We didn't have hot lunches. They had to go home for lunch. Many of them didn't even have homes to go to. So when I look at what we provide today, the plight of these kids is much different than the plight of children thirty or forty years ago. So many more opportunities, and hopefully they're taking advantage of them, because there are some wonderful programs for kids" (Appendix A, Interview 1).

I asked her if it was hard to be a teacher. "Sure. It's always hard to see that kind of deprivation. Today, we have different programs, but we still have a lot of problems,

no question, maybe even more, but schools are trying so hard to fill the gaps that others in society have not been able to. You know, the amazing thing, I do have to say this looking back over the years I have had kids in this situation, many of them do make it. As devastating as it is, now I'm having kids of the students I taught, and the students I'm teaching now are in much better shape than their parents were. Their parents are doing a better job parenting than their own parents did to them. Even though some of them still are in tough shape academically, they're doing better I can think of at least five, right here in this fifth-grade, whose parents I've taught. They're all doing better, remarkably better. I think a lot of our social programs are working. I really do. I think teachers are better at what we do. I think we're more conscious of treating kids with a great deal of respect. I think the things we've done over the years, programs have helped. There's a lot of problems out there, but what I see on a personal level, the kids are better off" (Appendix A, Interview 1).

When I asked Julia which programs seemed to be working, she mentioned Aid to Families with Dependent Children, private organizations, and "things we do that show we have confidence and respect for families. The counseling things we've done in the high schools and junior highs, the making kids aware of the needs of their children. Even though they had children when they were way too young, they seem to be investing as much as they possibly can. They're more aware of what their kids may need" (Appendix A, Interview 1).

Tom remembered an especially resilient student. "He's not out of school yet, but he is from the hood. He still lives there. He doesn't have a dad. He's never met his dad. As a matter of fact, I'm not sure if his mom knew who his dad was. His mom worked as

a barmaid. As far as I know, she still does. And he was just kind of raised in an awful situation. Very aggressive, when he was younger, but someone, somewhere along the way, taught him something different, because he comes to me all the time and shows me, 'These are the grades I'm getting. I haven't been in trouble.' It's been three or four years since he's been sent to SAC (a disciplinary in-school suspension). Has been on the honor roll several semesters in a row. He has really cleaned up his act, you know. He has just decided to be a survivor. And I mean he has talked to me about going to college. As a matter of fact, he asked me how he can apply for grants and things like that. We went and got some grant information. I told him where to go at Carver (local regional university) to get information. He brought them by; 'This is how you fill it out. This is the information you get from your mom.' And stuff like that, and so he's done that and he's really, he's going to make it. He's going to be a survivor. I know he's going to do well. But had a person looked at him several years ago, they would have said, 'no way!' I mean, he's just going to be another statistic. And fortunately, I think he is going to be a statistic. It's just going to be really good" (Appendix C, Interview 2).

Remembering his students the year of the fire, Tom said, "It was probably the best experience they could have had because, to this day, when I look back at classes that I've taught, there was never quite a bond as those students. They were so compassionate toward each other. They were, I don't know, they didn't assume that everything would be there. They realized that there was a loss and that even though there were some gains, we were able to buy some things again from insurance money, things we could put back in the classroom. They realized that this could all be gone, and so, when they came back, they had some emotional ties to things that were lost. So we had to make so many

adjustments. But because of all those changes in that year, students really just created quite a bond, and after it was all over, in the midst of it, was really often times stressful. But now that I look back, those are the kids probably that remember me the most. Remember our school and the situation. They're the ones that talk about the gains that they made. They're the ones that call me still to tell me they're on the honor roll in their school. Today I would say it was a very positive experience" (Appendix C, Interview 1).

When talking about resiliency in children, Tom has noticed that children have sophisticated ways of meeting teacher's expectations. "When I'm around them, I've got to be like this and when I'm around these people... I think kids are pretty flexible, as far as those things are concerned. A lot of it they do naturally because they read us so well. We don't think they do, but they read adults really well. And I think some of it comes naturally, but the sad thing is we're just teaching them to behave, how this particular environment wants them to behave, while we are also saying, 'don't be like someone else. Don't do what someone else does just because that's what they want you to do.' I do believe that we do have to take a stand against violence in school, fighting, and things like that. I'm not sure our approach is the proper approach. I want them to understand that you know somewhere in life, maybe it's not at home, that somewhere in life, you will be able to reason with people. People generally are reasonable. Maybe it's not that way at home. Maybe it's not that way, and without bashing home, without saying your parents are really awful people, somewhere, people really are reasonable. And then they should experience those reasonable people. And the funny thing is, the kids see us as just the same. We're just as unreasonable as everyone else is. So they're having to fight their way out of that situation, too. We really haven't proven anything different" (Appendix

C, interview 2).

Response to Stress

Merissa expresses frustration at the way children are devalued at school, and so they find acceptance on the street. "This one little boy came to school. He was just a hero because his mom had stabbed a guy last night in the school parking lot on Fourth of July. He was bragging, 'My momma got him. She got him good!' I said, 'That's nothing to be proud of.' 'Yes it is! Everybody was there watching my mom. The police came, the neighbors came out.' Well, to him that was a big event. This child is finding out that he can get all the publicity at home, on the streets, and when he's at school, he can't read. He knows he can't read. That's where we have a problem with these kids leaving school, when they realize they can't. And then they just don't want to come" (Appendix D, Interview 2).

Tom noticed that "Many times home is all instinct. I better do it and I better do it now. I can't wait around to think through this... And we want them to turn off home life, and this is school, this is school life... then you can turn it back off today, later on, but right now, let's just change lives completely. You're someone else. It's almost like, "When I'm around them, I've got to be like this and when I'm around these people..." I think kids are pretty flexible, as far as those things are concerned. A lot of it they do naturally because they read us so well. We don't think they do. They read adults really well. I mean if they jumped off a cliff would you? Well, is that what that environment expects of me? I guess I would. You know? They begin to read us, to read our actions.

And I'm not saying that, I do believe that we do have to take a stand against violence in school, fighting, and things like that" (Appendix C, Interview 2).

Personal Themes

Personal History

Merissa felt her childhood background in integrated schools with high populations of students with special needs prepared her to teach in inner city schools. "Well, you see, I came from inner city Detroit, and nothing surprised me (laughs), I came from my school district. We had quite a bit, and that is one reason I went into Special Ed. I was in the building with special needs kids, handicapped, you know, the whole thing, and they had a wing and we had a wing. I wasn't really shocked at what I had to do as an educator, that really didn't surprise me that a lot was asked and little was given in return. It's always that one student that makes you come back, and you say It was worth it the whole year just to see that little baby read or get that math, or feel so good about themselves that they'll continue on." I didn't go into it with the attitude that it's going to be glamorous, and I'm going to sit down to this wonderful desk, and I'm going to have all these cutesy things to play with. No, I knew that if you want it done, you do it" (Appendix D, Interview 1).

She further explained how her ethnic history has affected her understanding as a teacher. "Now, my husband grew up in Dallas when they had real prejudice. I grew up in the North. He said, 'You mean to tell me you didn't have drinking fountains that said, "colored" and drinking fountains that said "white?" I said, 'No, see you have to understand it was free slaves that went North while you were still down here in this

bondage thing.' Growing up in inner city schools, I went to integrated schools my entire life. I hit a black school in college and had a nervous breakdown. I could not handle it. It was totally bizarre to me. My son went to a black college for a year, and it was the best thing for him because it was a small college. But the culture in the dorm drove him crazy. He was not used to that music. He was not used to the dialogue. He was not used to people not caring, and he saw a lot of that down there and would say, 'I can't believe that.' But then the other side was he met other men like himself from divorced single-parent homes, dads that are real important people but not taking time for me. (laugh) And he would call me and say, 'I am not alone.' The prejudices my husband talked about, his education was not as good as the white school. We had prejudice, don't get me wrong, but as far as blatant, out and out, North just didn't have it. We just didn't have it. He said, 'I just can't believe that!' And this was a big discussion in the house. My kids, they've never had that. They've never gone to a predominantly black school or predominantly white. It's always been an integrated school their entire life. For them to go to a black college. It would be a challenge because it is a different culture and it is a different mindset. And some black colleges still believe the white man is the enemy. When you teach that, and you go a job interview, and there's a white man interviewing you, how are you going to respond? You don't have any clue. You're filled with fear, wondering, 'Why am I here anyway?' (Appendix D, Interview 2).

Hope

I asked Tom about kids who are able to make it, despite all predictions of failure. He answered, "I'd like to think that's me. I'd really like to think that. In my family, I

have three older brothers and my parents, and it was like that at home. It was a fight. If you wanted something, you fought for it. If you didn't win, you didn't get it. Whether that was dinner or your way, in any form or fashion, you fought for it. And I like to think that there are all different kinds of ways students go about doing that. I think that one thing is, that they see someone. Like in my particular situation, in one particular year, two people made a great impact on me. One of them was a teacher. One was a principal. One, the principal said, 'You and your brothers are all going to be losers just like your parents.' It was my principal, you know? And I was a kid who made decent grades. As a matter of fact, I made really good grades. And I did choose to try to forget about that. I could turn that off, because it was just a, I was away from there, so in my mind, I'd just shut that off. That was my survival, just to shut it off. But, you know, that statement just really shocked me. However, the very same year, my teacher showed me what a reasonable person does. She was very compassionate when I did things that were just totally uncalled for and off the wall. She didn't accept it as acceptable behavior, but she didn't just lash me. She explained why it was unacceptable, who else I would hurt in the process. She would tell me, 'I'm not going to behave that way toward you because I don't think it's right.' Compassion just really overflowed in her. So those examples both really helped me. It's sad to say that my principal's really helped me, but I thought, 'I'm gonna be like her! I'm gonna be nothing like that!' It was just, and it was a mindset. I said my mind was I don't want to be like him and I certainly am not going to be a loser like he says I'm going to be. Because I didn't want to meet his expectations. I wanted to meet Mrs. Hubbard's expectations, because that was, maybe, that's just what I wanted to be. I've seen kids just like that" (Appendix C, Interview 2).

Efficacy

While talking about the great number of tests now required by the state in targeted grade levels, Julia said, " I intend to begin to start writing some letters. The last year I was at Thompson, we had a student assistant group where certain teachers were trained. Then we would facilitate counseling groups, and many girls came back and told me of situations, and many had happened while they were in elementary school. I think that may have been one reason why I made the decision to come back to elementary school. When this started, they were in early elementary. I thought, "Is there something I can do to raise their self esteem so that they will be able to say no, or they'll be able to tell, before all the damage is done?' Some of them actually were suicidal because it was so hard for them to deal with what had happened. And that is hard, and you do have to tell. And it is hard to console a child who's worried about their own parent or family member. It's very hard (Appendix A, Interview 1).

"I think teachers can do a lot of things. And they're probably very generic things that we talk about all the time, but I don't know that they're being done. That is one, just be very compassionate to their survival, and two, to really show them how to be a survivor whether you come from a bad experience or not. Just show them how to treat other people. How to be that reasonable person. How not to be 'I'm going to physically defend myself to the end. And I'm going to lash out at other people.' To show them how not to be that way. To actually, and in the process that means you're going to have to portray those actions and attitudes toward them whenever they wrong us as teachers. And that's one thing as teachers. If they wrong each other, we can talk them through it.

Where if they wrong us, we want to crucify them. When, gosh, all they did was... And yes, you're an adult, and there's a respect issue. I understand, and I do believe that students need to respect adults. But who's going to teach them how to respect adults, and who's gonna teach them how to respect each other? You know, if we just expect them to be born and to know that, then we have wronged them already. And if they're not being respectful, and we just say, 'well you need to be respectful' instead of actually teaching them how to be respectful. These are the things, and not only tell them what they need to say, but to say them, when they are being good. Kind of catch them being good, kinds of things. If we haven't done that, we've wronged them. And I even go so far as to say that it's not only a question of 'can we help them?,' but if we don't then we have hurt them. We really need to have really good teachers get into the profession who really, really not only want to teach kids because they love learning and they love teaching them information, but we also need some teachers who want to show some compassion for kids. And I don't mean compassion to be a detriment, because there can be a point where compassion can be that you're letting them get away with things that you really need to teach them not to do. Someone that is compassionate to the point of really wanting to help change the situation. Change some behaviors, some actions. I love it when kids come tell me they're on the honor roll and they're doing all these wonderful things. It makes me feel like sometime maybe I made a small change (Appendix C, Interview 2).

"Sometimes that may mean not requiring so much when they leave. I have no proof except for some experiences that I've had. But if this student knows that, I mean the survival students, if this student knows that when he gets here at eight and when he leaves here at three I'm gonna expect him to do these certain things. I'll work with his

needs, and all that kind of thing, but when three o'clock comes I'm not going to expect anything else. Sometimes they can draw themselves out of that, realize this is a safe enough environment, 'I'm here, I can do this,' and it doesn't mean they're not thinking about other things, not worried, not stressed out, but I can work on this because I know at three o'clock it's over. I think what a lot of kids are seeing is that I've done this all day, then at three o'clock they're being sent all this other stuff, because they didn't do what they were supposed to during the day, you know, they were daydreaming, all that kind of thing. And that's gonna happen, but what I have felt like has happened is that at three o'clock and I shut it down anyway, no matter what has happened, then the time began to be spent more wisely because they didn't have to worry about it along with everything else that night. There are kids who just really don't have a lot of stress in their life and just need some extra help, and homework, and that kind of thing is great, but not for a survival student. They need to know that there's a time when this quits. Yes. They have so much to do. They have homework. It's actual home work, and they need a stop time. To know it's over. And when they can see a light at the end of the tunnel, I think that sometimes they can come out of survival. That's only, that's a very small part of it. But I think that's certainly a beginning of how I can change, to assist them in their needs (Appendix C, Interview 2).

Vision for the Future

Vision for Families

Merissa speaks of parents who are unaware of their children's difficulties because

they do not have an understanding of normal child development. She would like to design a program where parents and children work together in appropriate settings to teach parents how to work with their children while providing enriching activities for preschool-age children. "We have a cycle we need to break. It will cost us less to break it early than to break it later when they are in prison" (Appendix D, Interview 1).

Vision for Classrooms

Merissa talks about young boys that she has seen get into trouble just to be noticed. "They don't know how to do anything to achieve the stuff that they want. They want a new car. They want new clothes. They're going to go steal them if they can't get them by any other way. Who's going to give them a job when they steal rather than go to high school? They are not sure how to put a sentence together and not sure how to use a computer because the only time they get to use it is at a 30-minute lab at school. So they are sitting there lost. I've seen a lot of kids in junior high that I know will not see ninth grade. It's because of interest. They have no interest in what we are doing" (Appendix D, Interview 1).

I asked Tom about technology in his classroom. "It was fantastic. It was phenomenal. I recognized that the students who had already experienced failure, the majority of them were from inner city, low socioeconomic places, so technology wasn't something they had in their home. Technology wasn't something that was in most schools at that time. Even if they did, it was just one or two computers here and there, and the teachers weren't able to get everyone on the computer. A lot of kids who finished first could use the computer. Well, it was never these students. Basically they

were in a catch twenty-two where they were never able to use any technology in their school or at home, then they came to our program where they just had it at their fingertips. Everyday we went to the lab for forty minutes. Then they also had use of the ones in the classroom; each one of them probably had a half-hour each day. So it was well over an hour a day on a computer per student. It was amazing. By the end of the year they were much more computer literate than I was. That's not necessarily saying much, but it made them excited about school. It made them want to be there. I felt like technology was really important in our program because the kids who had just had no access to it were able to come in and have multiple opportunities. It really enhanced their learning because we were able to put programs on there that were at their level, plus we could group activities" (Appendix C, Interview 1).

Vision for Teacher Preparation

According to Tom, "Universities need to become more responsive to the needs of teachers. That they are not all instructional needs. There are many needs that teachers have. I couldn't give them all the answers, but if they could do a needs assessment of teachers, especially in inner city schools, 'What would you say your greatest needs are?' I guarantee it would show us there are some places where we're going off track, where we're beating the dead dog over here and not really taking care of things we need to. That could be a training tool for the university to say, 'Okay, these are some things we need to really tackle in the area of teaching teachers" (Appendix C, Interview 1).

Merissa believes that we do need more authentic multicultural education that goes beyond, "Let me show you how to get along with people." Merissa feels that pre-service

teachers need to spend more time in schools and joining teachers on home visits. She feels they need to be aware of cultures, disabilities, and absence of resources in inner city schools. "When we get to the in-depth, multicultural life style the more comfortable we're going to become as educators, and I cannot stress enough the experiences must be first hand. We need to have a contact person in buildings so that students can come in and see what goes on, to walk around and stay with a bilingual assistant for a day to see what they have to go through. Our Vietnamese assistant has three languages that she's trying to deal with, plus they have a slang just like we do. We are so blessed to have a bilingual secretary this year because she helps with the Hispanic population so we don't alienate them. By having her, we have increased our population a great deal because they feel comfortable. It's kind of like the Jehovah's Witnesses out there in the Talis and Stratton Elementary areas. I had all their kids, I had a whole church. Parents said, 'Well you make them feel so special. You know they don't feel, our kids don't feel like they're different.' Novice teachers need to know everybody doesn't get to teach in quote, 'middle class, upper class' America schools. We just need to let them know that, and, they need to be aware that this is not TV. We do really have kids like this" (Appendix D, Interview 1).

"My teacher preparation was excellent, absolutely excellent," said Julia. "I graduated from the Rhode Island College of Education. It's Rhode Island College now, and it had originally been a teacher normal school way back at the turn of the century. It was very progressive. It had a laboratory school right on the campus with the very best teachers teaching in it, so you taught lessons from the time you were a junior to a classroom. You were critiqued, and you were critiqued with a loving hand. But every

little thing that you managed to miss, as far as even using the wrong pronoun, the teacher would correct you, in a loving way or however, in front of the whole class. Your class would sit and watch you teach. Then you'd get back together again, and they'd say what they thought you did well and if there were anything that needed to be added. And it really helped me hone my skills. I think I was ready, when I hit the classroom I was ready. I had a rigorous schedule of academic classes, and I had a minor which I think a lot of kids graduating from college don't seem to have. They don't seem to have a specialization in anything. I had a minor in English, which I think has really put me in good stead. I think every teacher needs that one area of focus that they've really done in-depth work in. I also think that some work in the classroom needs to be done. Teaching is not an exact science, but there's enough research out there that shows us what are good practices and what are not good practices. And malpractice in education today should not be allowed because we have enough people that know that certain behaviors lead to more learning. So I do think that teacher preparation classes are good, but I also believe in strong academics" (Appendix A, Interview 1).

Merissa said that her special education coursework and field experience helped her understand how development differs among children and gave her specific techniques for addressing students' difficulties. "My special education helped me more than my Master's in Early Childhood. Because in special education they geared you to the lower child, you knew the levels that might come in, but in early childhood we did not deal a lot with inner city. If I had not taught and didn't realize they were already there to ask pertinent questions about, 'Now how do I gear this down with my kids?' if you had gone straight through it wouldn't have helped very much. I think sometimes we are too far

removed, and because of the work that they have to cover the regular classroom when you are in the college of education, they miss that whole culture of children. And I do believe we are going to have to start recognizing the other cultures that are coming up" (Appendix D, Interview 1).

"Universities need to bring education students into school buildings once a week, or in a night class have somebody come in first hand. To see the frustration of the teacher as well as the student when you can't teach them, then that is what I see a lot happening sometimes is that the teachers are as frustrated as the kids because 'I can't reach that person'" (Appendix D, Interview 1).

Agnes felt that universities could do more to give novice teachers a broader sense of the demands placed on teachers at specific times of the school year.

> They make student teaching longer. I know in a lot of places they student teach for a year. That may be a financial hardship, but even if they student taught a whole semester in one classroom, that would be so much better, because they get in, they learn the kids barely, then they're gone to a new class. And I know that's very difficult. When I student taught, I taught PE and I had two classes of 200 kids apiece. I didn't get to know any of those kids. I only had them for five weeks, and we had a week of snow, so I really only had them for four weeks. I didn't get to know any of those kids personally, and I think with the classroom, they need to have longer than six weeks to teach because you really can't fully prepare for the different things that go on. You need to know how to start the year, see how it starts. You need to know what it's like around a break time. You

> definitely need to know what it's like around Christmas (laugh) and then how to start the new year, grading periods and that kind of thing. I think so many student teachers would be better off. We have a lot of good student teachers, but I think a longer training period would be good" (Appendix A, Interview 1).

Agnes also would like to make sure that professors keep up with current trends and understand that classroom practices are not static, but constantly evolving (Appendix A, Interview 1).

I asked Agnes about preparing teachers for the tough situations that come up in children's lives outside school. She replied, "You can't train somebody for that. Every situation is just a little bit different. You can't say, 'Ok in this situation you're going to have to do this and this.' You can't because this kid has had his furniture thrown out. It might have been because the boyfriend threw the parent out. This one that's got his furniture on the lawn, it might be because the whole family's been evicted. That's two totally different situations. There may be no abuse in this one, but there is in this one. I think student teachers need to be aware of what could be a situation that they deal with. And when children come to school in a bad mood already, you know it wasn't you that did anything. And you try your best, but if they're already in trouble and you try to set the mood and they just can't deal with it, you're going to have a long day. And that kid may be as sweet as pie the next day, but that one day that he's there, just in a bad mood and won't do anything for you. It's hard. It's really hard. Grade level objectives should be the least of our worries, but unfortunately it's not. When you have children who've been exposed to drug and alcohol abuse, you don't know what to do with them if you've

never had one before. You don't know if they're retarded, you don't know if they're LD, you don't know if there's just nothing upstairs. More of that because of what their mother did when they were pregnant or the father" (Appendix B, Interview 1).

Who knows what changes in schooling await us in the coming century. Futurists tell us we can expect minorities to become the majority, and the gap between America's wealthiest and poorest families to continue widening while the middle continues to shrink. Julia said, "We have the school open in the evening. We have the daycare now. Schools have just changed dramatically from when I started teaching in the fifties. Now we're looking toward schools as being community centers" (Appendix A, Interview 2).

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTIONS

What I'm saying is that all I hear from people
says that I don't count much.
But all I know about You says I do.
You say I've got potential,
And even if I didn't, You'd still care.
And I'm hanging my hopes on you.
-Rev. Don Bakley (1976)

One could get the impression that I am blaming teacher preparation programs for failing to prepare teachers for urban teaching environments, or President Johnson for creating housing projects that have become ghettos, or society for warehousing children in such places, immersed in violence and poverty. My intent is not to blame, but rather to start a conversation. What is the reality? What are the possibilities?

When I began teaching in an inner city school, wide-eyed, and incredibly naive, I was completely overwhelmed by the tremendous academic, physical, and emotional needs of my students and their families. I had very few tools for meeting those needs. Lacking my mother's philosophical pragmatism, I cried a lot. I blamed myself and wondered why I ever thought I could be a teacher. My supervisor at that time was surprised that I blamed myself rather than the children, which she said was more typical of new teachers in inner city schools. In truth, I was in awe of the children. Everyday, my kids walked through neighborhoods that the police advised me not to drive through. And here I was, concerned about them knowing alphabet sounds!

This study is not about placing blame, but rather about exploring the many interrelated factors that create problems, because only when a conversation is started can we begin to see possible paths toward solutions. The problems are neither beyond hope nor are they as easily fixed as popular movies, television shows, and novels would have us believe. Unfortunately, all urban classrooms are not filled with dedicated teachers like Jamie Escalante, Pat Conroy, Marva Collins, and LouAnn Johnson. Unlike the implications of these inspirational stories, teachers do not always have the power and means to make the kind of dramatic changes that they have accomplished.

What Does it Mean to Teach for Resiliency?

"Community begins in the classroom" (Carnes, 1997). Early childhood teachers have tremendous influence not only in how each child views his or herself in relation to the group, but also in creating a template for future group interactions. Susan Kerr is quoted by Carnes about her work: "Children moving into foster care sometimes take with them only what fits in a suitcase. They may never again smell the smell of what's familiar to them. They may never again hear the sound of what's familiar. They lose that connection, they may never get it back. And there's no one to talk with them about it. And yet we're asking them to be delightful, energetic, and well behaved, prepared to learn."

I do believe that "kids are kids," and that each individual is more alike than they are different at any socio-economic level. In my experience working with middle and upper class families, I haven't been able to shake the feeling that most of the children

will be okay, no matter what I do. Teaching in inner city schools, I had the feeling that a caring teacher might be the only hope for many children's very survival.

Some teachers appear to have the idea that only certain "normal" children belong in their classrooms. Any child who doesn't fit this ideal, at least in the teacher's mind, really should be somewhere else. So those children who need the most help, whether with social skills, language skills, physical disabilities, or controlling their behaviors, may get the least positive attention from the teacher. I think universities can address this problem by teaching about the range of ages and abilities that are possible in regular classrooms, and how to adapt lessons to meet the needs of learners present, instead of the kind of response favored by a certain instructor in my master's program. Whenever my friend or I would ask about applying assessments to the population we were teaching, the instructor would snap, "We're only talking about average normal children here!"

One important skill my mentor, Dr. Scott, taught me as a pre-service and as novice teacher, was to avoid the negative undercurrent often found in the teacher's lounge. She said, "Eat in your own classroom, be friendly but, keep your friendships outside of the school where you teach." That bit of advice has kept me out of many political messes, and each time that I ignored it, I later regretted not following her advice. In several buildings I was, "that crazy lady at the end of the hall, whose kids didn't really learn anything, they just played all the time." Luckily, since I was "just teaching little kids" even that perception didn't bother other teachers too much. But over time, I would notice my detractors peeking in my classroom windows, trying to figure out why my student's test scores were as good as theirs, and yet we still seemed to be having fun. I would just smile and wave to them.

What can Teachers Do?

"Some of the children arrive at school not knowing their names; they just know their nickname . . . They don't know how to hold a pencil or a book. And it seems like you never catch up." Principal Ruby Greer, quoted by Kunen (1996). The reality is that children whose cultural values differ from those of the schools, or whose parents are so busy surviving they have not taught children these skills prior to the beginning of formal education, are in fact worthy of the best our schools can offer them. They deserve to be met where they are and challenged to grow intellectually and emotionally, not to be measured by some norm-referenced stick that's designed to demoralize by showing just how far behind they are. Positive early school experiences and warm nurturing relationships with teachers contribute to children's ability to cope with stress and trauma (Garbarino, 1992).

I found teachers who expressed frustration with grade level expectations that assume prior-to-schooling experience with language and basic concepts that are based upon white middle-class norms. This deficit model effectively places kindergarten and preschool teachers with "one foot in a hole" and the rest of a child's school career is spent trying to catch-up.

The teachers in my study have indicated that their basic values and those of the school are often in conflict with those of the families and community they serve. The teachers have found that they must put forth an effort to understand various cultures and experiences of their students. In order to provide an atmosphere where children can learn

despite children's absence of security, and sometimes even the absence of parents, outside of school, teachers must provide a sense of security, trust, and psychological safety inside their classroom. Teachers must try to reach children whose talents and abilities may be more valued in the streets than in the classroom.

In a chapter titled, "Gentle Teaching in a Violent Society," Martin Haberman (1995, p. 91) describes a teaching environment where control, achieved by using punishment and coercion, simply cannot work because the harshest punishments available to teachers are trivial compared to violence children experience everyday. He suggests instead gentle teaching filled with respect and courtesy to empower children by sharing authority and building trust. "Star teachers see their jobs as helping to create safe havens where, for a good part of every day, the madness and violence will not intrude and their children will experience freedom from fear. Some other teachers do not have this job concept at all - they simply believe that because violence should not occur, it should not be in school and therefore, it should not be a part of the teacher's day-to-day work..."

What Can Be Done to Prepare Teachers?

I believe that people drawn to the teaching profession have the best interest of children at heart, unfortunately, they sometimes become confused by ideas of discipline, building and district expectations, and other factors that sometimes cause them to loose sight of the children. I believe that university teacher preparation programs can help pre-service teachers maintain focus on the experiences and meaning for the child. They can also provide practicum experiences to demystify inner city schools, and develop real

screening tools to select only bright and capable students to be trained as teachers. Universities must continue to actively conduct research in the forgotten inner city classrooms to continue to find ways to best meet the needs of children and teachers there.

Haberman (1995) believes that traditional teacher preparation methods are counterproductive for children living in poverty. Teachers who are prepared to teach "normal" children make mental lists of the children who do not "belong" in their classes. In impoverished areas, those lists may include half or all of the class. Haberman compares it to dentists who expect all their patients to be toothpaste models and are shocked to have patients with tooth decay who expect treatment. In 1986 Haberman found that less than 1% of teacher educators had taught in urban schools for three years or more. Preservice teachers are taught that normal development is equated with White, Christian, English speaking middle-class, and typically believe that "the poor are stupid, lazy, without initiative, and lacking in moral responsibility" (1995, p. 51). The result is that victims are blamed for teacher, system, and curricular failures, and children are given labels such as "at-risk," or whatever term of inadequacy being used at the moment. And so hope is diminished for the child, while the labeler is seen as blameless and as trying to be helpful.

Teachers in my study believe that schools can provide family services and parent education to improve the lives of children beyond the school day. They suggest that classrooms should provide access to technology and provide enough time for children to become fluent in the use of computers and other technology. Vocational training is also called for, as a means of making school curriculum relevant to children's lives and to give them a purpose to stay in school.

Teachers in my study believe that teacher preparation programs can be improved by further studying the needs of inner city teachers, providing more internships and practicum experiences with a variety of school personnel, and extending the length of the student teaching experience. There is also a call for mentor relationships and bringing focus to undergraduate studies through a minor or other specialization.

Missing Themes

There were some themes that I expected to find in this study, but did not find. I was surprised by the following three outcomes:

Absence of Blame

The teachers interviewed did not spend a great deal of time blaming anyone for the monumental tasks they face. I expected discussion of frustration with building principals and central administration. One of the reasons I left the classroom was the feeling of powerlessness under unreasonable administrators who clearly did not act in the best interest of children. Instead I found discussion of teachers ready to find sources of problems, ready to "roll up their sleeves and get to work."

Absence of Discussion about Race

Three of four respondents, each of whom is white, rarely or never mentioned race or ethnicity, although their schools each had a large minority population. I am unsure if this is because they did not see it as an issue, or if they were uncomfortable with

discussing it, perhaps afraid of using improper terms or unintentionally casting a negative light upon themselves.

Absence of Helplessness

This, I think, is the most important factor in teaching for resiliency, teachers who do not feel overwhelmed and helpless. Each of these teachers had developed theories of what can and needs to be done to help children and families survive and become resilient. Each of these teachers implemented their personal theories and adapted the theories of others into their classroom practice.

With recent national and regional disasters, I have been thinking about ribbons. What kinds of situations cause people to wear ribbons and which do not? I believe it has something to do with the feeling of helplessness. If people feel helpless, as they did during Desert Storm, facing AIDS and breast cancer, and toward bombing victims, they will wear ribbons to show their thoughts and prayers. If there is work to be done, in the case of tornadoes and hurricanes, people simply get to work, rather than wear ribbons, as was indicated in a recent newspaper photo of a disaster area being toured by the president. Someone had hand painted a sign, "Hey, Clinton, grab a shovel!" The teachers in my study seem to be shovel-grabbers rather than ribbon-wearers.

Concluding Thoughts

As the Venn Diagram in chapter four illustrates, there is significant overlap between my findings and those of Martin Habeman. There are differences as well. Where his formula for selecting "Star Teachers" is straightforward and fairly simple, my

presentation of real events is more complex and not conducive to creating a "recipe for success." This study does, however paint a portrait of real teacher's lives in inner city classrooms. In a gallery of possible teaching situations, I believe this portrait would be easily discernable from the portraits of rural and suburban teaching, which was one of my goals in conducting this study

The process of writing this study has caused me to reflect more deeply on my own experiences and the meaning and purposes of schooling. It has had a transformative effect on my thinking about teacher's experience. I now find myself imagining individual teacher's experiences in a more personal way, through their eyes, as they experience situations, and less as a somewhat objective outsider.

I have asked the participants in this study, as well as several friends who are, or have been teachers to read this study and share their thoughts. Many found it to be depressing, which was not my intent, although I understand the subject matter is rather somber. All agreed that it resonated with their own experiences. One person said it was good to know she was not alone. I think that it is significant that many teachers do feel isolated, and may not be aware of others who are also facing the same struggles. One participant said reading the study made her cry. Another said it made her want to return to teaching in an inner city school. Julia also pointed out that her hair was not, in fact, white as I had originally reported, but blonde, and I have made the correction.

The most important thing to realize is that there are teachers and children struggling every day with very little fiscal, physical, or psychological support, not just in New York and L.A., but also in Little Rock and Kansas City. I did not expect to find a clear solution, and I did not find one, although that would have been a tidy way to end. I

present instead authentic stories of real human beings who have quietly worked on the front lines to improve the lives of children in their own classroom without asking for recognition or anything else in return. My hope is that some part of these teachers' experiences will resonate with the experience of the reader, and that the reader will "have a new thought that you have never even thought of before" (Caulkins, 1996). It is my profound hope that the stories presented here will spark new thoughts in the mind of the reader. I hope that new thoughts will lead to understanding as connections are made with the readers' own lived experience, and that each new understanding will lead to further questions and further classroom research. Through exploring what the realities of inner city teaching really are, we can ask more meaningful questions and create policies and reforms that are relevant.

This study is my attempt to help others "make things better" in their own classrooms and in the future classrooms of preservice teachers. I believe we as teachers and teacher educators can make a difference one child at a time, one classroom at a time, and it begins with educating the whole teacher to reach the whole child. "For we do not see with our eyes or hear with our ears, but with our beliefs" (Caulkins, 1996).

John F. Kennedy said, in his 1962 State of the Union Address, "If we cannot fulfill our own ideals here, we cannot expect others to accept them. And when the youngest child alive today has grown to the cares of manhood, our position in the world will be determined first of all by what provisions we make today - for his education, his health, and his opportunities for a good home and a good job and a good life" (Washington & Andrews, 1999).

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APPENDIX A
Agnes's Interviews and Written Protocol

AGNES[1]
Interview 1
December 2, 1998

Tell me about some kids that have been in your classes.[2]

Just kids in general or specifics?

Just whatever stands out in your mind.

I have some kids that come to school wondering if they're going to have dinner that night. They don't know if their mom's coming home at night, they don't know if they're going to have a place to sleep when they get home because some of them have gone home and found their stuff out on the front yard. Then you have your other kids that have two parents, well-adjusted families. They've never been divorced, they've never been married to anybody else, they've never had any problems at all with the law, from law abiding citizens to families, then you have those that don't know where the next meal's coming from, and often are in trouble with the law.

Is there in anything in teaching, especially inner city teaching, that surprised you, or that you weren't prepared for?

I wasn't prepared for parent's attitudes. That can't understand why we give homework. Can't understand why we won't give their kids a break on every single thing that we do. Can't understand why we won't accept excuses like I left it in the car...Just the whole parent attitude, especially of welfare parents who want everybody to give their kids everything, but don't expect their kids to give us anything. That's the biggest thing.

Do you have any idea what causes that?

They didn't have a good school life themselves, and they don't expect their kids to have one so they don't give their kids a reason to be motivated and they were always given excuses. Or their parents always gave them excuses, so they figure that's the way to get their kid off the hook. And, unfortunately, no matter how we try, it doesn't matter. I will tell parents, "I'm sorry, but you're not the one in the classroom. It's your child that's getting the grades, your child's doing the work. Do not expect me to pass them along just because you said, something that is either obviously false or just an excuse to get their kid out of work."

So they may be saying, they don't want their child to have responsibility?

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[1] All names of teachers, children, and administrators have been changed.
[2] The interviewer's words are underlined throughout all appendices.

That's the bottom line! They don't think their kids should have to do anything that any bit difficult, and that we should be their parent basically, we should be the ones making sure they do all this stuff, and if we're teaching responsibility, that's got to be not what the kids are doing, not what we're doing because they'll be babies all their lives. That's one more part of the system that we would all like to see vanished.

How do you feel that your teacher preparation program in college prepared you to teach in inner city?

Oh, I don't think it did. I think I just caught on to it, because when I student taught, I student taught in a very affluent neighborhood, real affluent, then when I got my first job in Virginia, it was inner city, (laugh) so my preparation student teaching wise had nothing to do with what I actually wound up doing.

Tell me when you say "caught on" how did you catch on, how did that happen?

I learned the tricks, I learned how to deal with some of the parents, and I learned how to deal with these kids and their attitudes, I won't say that I played their games, but I let them know that they would have to play mine. Those who didn't would have to deal with what the consequences were. Some times that wasn't so funny, and some times the kids would say, I need to get on the ball.

Where have you taught?

In Virginia and in Germany.

How did Germany compare to teaching in the United States?

Oh, it was a military, Department of Defense schools. It was anything you wanted. Kids could go anywhere on field trips, they could go way out of town, I mean we're talking way out of town, to Austria to go skiing, and there's no way we'd ever be allowed to do anything like that here. The bad thing was that the parents would get house sitters, they would go on these wonderful places and leave the kids at home. Which I thought was depriving their children of cultural experiences. True, they may have needed a vacation, they should take the kids with them if it was going to be a family vacation. That was the biggest difference I saw. Mostly officers who could afford to take a first class flight somewhere for two weeks, then, along the same lines, when they went somewhere as a family, they spent lots of money, went lots of different places, and they got their kids out. I noticed lower enlisted people, there was one family that spent five years in Munich and they never went anywhere until the month before they left. They spent their entire life of five years on that base, Which I think is kind of sad. Here we have mountains ten or fifteen minutes away and some of them never go there.

Have you had kids whose parents were incarcerated or in jail?

Most of them were drugs, 95% of the kids I've had with parents in jail for anything, that's what they were there for. They just don't know what to do because they are living with someone who may or may not be a relative. This one particular boy who was living with his mother's best friend and her boyfriend. It was a very bad situation, and he said that he wanted to go see his mom. He was very anxious on the days he got to go see his mom, his situation was different because the lady he was living with was abusive and she thought that discipline meant that swats on the legs constantly and berating him in front of the kids and that type of thing. You could see that a toll was being paid on this boy because he didn't have any reason to live basically, because his own, his whole life was his mom and she was not there. The life he was leading was hell.

Did she have other kids of her own?

They allowed her to adopt one, and before they rotated to Georgia, they had children taken away from her because of abuse, because a teacher finally spotted visible signs, I never saw visible signs, all I was hearing was the way she talked to him, but that wasn't enough. So that's the kind of thing we also have to deal with, kids who don't live with their own parents, but have to deal with however they are being treated.

Whoever happens to be there?

Yes.

Let's talk a little about kids on DHS assistance, or reporting suspected abuse. Is that a part of your job?

Yes because if you don't report it, you could be arrested. It's hard, especially when they're being taken away from their parents. You know where they're going is a better place than where they're living now. I had a boy last year whose mom lived in a hotel, she was a stripper, and there were something like four kids living in this one hotel room, and she had different men in and out, and they got taken away from her for some of the incidents that happened at school. Her little brother's behavior, they were so upset about that. The kid in my class was really devastated because he was leaving his mother. And there was absolutely nothing I could do to make him feel better about moving to a better situation because that was the only situation he knew, so there couldn't be anything better than that. It made me sad, because when that happened, he quit working for me. He moved to a foster home a week later and then he was gone. I have no idea what's happened to him, and he got split from his brother which is a whole other thing. A lot of them, when they get taken away from their parents, if there's a lot of kids in the family, they don't go to the same foster home. And that's got to be really hard on them, that's all they're thinking about, they can't do their work.

So they're losing their classroom, too?

Everything. And they don't trust anybody, because they don't know when they'll be moved again.

What would you recommend for teacher education programs to help teachers prepare for such situations?

That they make student teaching longer. I know in a lot of places they student teach for a year. That may be a financial hardship, but even if they student taught a whole semester in one classroom, that would be so much better, because they get in, they learn the kids barely, then they're gone to a new class. And I know that's very difficult. When I student taught, I taught PE and I had two classes of 200 kids apiece. I didn't get to know any of those kids. I only had them for five weeks and we had a week of snow, so I really only had them for four weeks. I didn't get to know any of those kids personally, and I think with the classroom, they need to have longer than six weeks to teach, because if you don't have any longer than that, you really can't fully prepare for the different things that go on. You need to know how to start the year, see how it starts. You need to know what it's like around a break time. You definitely need to know what it's like around Christmas (laugh) and then how to start the new year. Grading periods and that kind of thing. I think so many student teachers would be better off. We have a lot of good student teachers, but I think a longer training period would be good. Now ministers do it for a year, doctors do it for two years. I did grading during student teaching but it wasn't enough, I think the teachers are. . . In Virginia, I student taught with somebody who was student teaching for the whole year from another university in another state. She had lived there, so she came back there to do it. I think she was probably a whole lot better prepared. If there were student teaching for a year, I think there should be some financial compensation, but I don't know how they would work that out. So many money problems. That to me would be the key. The second thing I think they should do, professors shouldn't keep telling students "this is the way it's going to happen because when I was in the classroom. . . 40 years ago!" It's not the same thing. It's not the same as ten years ago when I started. The whole thing has drastically changed. I know when my supervisor came to observe me the first time, said, "Well you need to do this and this because when I student taught..." I said well hold on a minute, because this is my class and I've done everything you've told me to do, but this particular group, they just pay attention, they don't respond, and I had 30 of them in the classroom. And when I did my elementary it was a lot different, but if they could not expect us to know what they tell us as far as their background, because education is changing all the time, and in the next five years it's going to be a whole lot different than it is now.

Talking about teacher prep, what about to deal with these kids whose parents are in jail and whose stuff is on the lawn when they get home at the end of the day

You can't train somebody for that, every situation is just a little bit different. You can't say, "Ok in this situation you're going to have to do this and this. But you can't because this kid has had his furniture thrown out, it might have been because the boyfriend threw the parent out. This one that's got his furniture on the lawn, it might be because the whole family's been evicted. That's two totally different situations, there may be no abuse in this one, but there is in this one. I think maybe student teachers need to be aware of what could be a situation that they deal with. And when they come to

school in a bad mood already, you know it wasn't you that did anything. And you try your best but if they're already in trouble, and you try to set the mood and they just can't deal with it. You're going to have a long day. And that kid may be as sweet as pie the next day, but that one day that he's there, just in a bad mood and won't do anything for you. It's hard, it's really hard. Grade level objectives should be the least of our worries but unfortunately it's not. When you have children who've been exposed to drug and alcohol abuse, you don't know what to do with them if you've never had one before. You don't know if they're retarded, you don't know if they're LD, you don't know if there's just nothing upstairs. More of that because of what their mother did when they were pregnant or the father.

I know you have to leave now, Thank you. I'll be back again in a few weeks.

AGNES

Written Protocol

Written Between Interviews One and Two

In 1981, I was physical education teacher for special populations. My most memorable experience in teaching is from a class of Trainable Mentally Retarded students (this was an acceptable term to use for this population in that time period). These students were ages 10-22 and we were practicing for the state basketball tournament in Special Olympics. All the students were so excited because this was the first time many had been invited to attend this event.

The skills possessed by many of these students were very poor so I had my work cut out for me. The enthusiasm of the students was high so I knew all the work was well worth the effort put by both the students and the teacher. We practiced foul shots, jump shots, lay-ups, guarding, passing, dribbling, and teamwork. Some days it was a total disaster because they couldn't remember what I had told them the day before. One girl, Donna, was so short that she couldn't even touch the rim when throwing the ball. But she continued to practice every day.

One day I had a particularly hard practice. All the students were quite excited because it was near the day of the tournament. I was working with small groups of people to get them used to the actual playing conditions. One boy was not paying a lot of attention and he hit me with the ball, breaking my glasses. One girl was crying because she couldn't run very fast. Some were just standing around.

Feeling very frustrated and ready to end practice early, I turned around to see what Donna was doing. She had been standing doing nothing but trying to get the ball to hit the rim. At that precise moment not only did she get it to touch the rim but it went in the basket, nothing but net! I stood there with my mouth wide open and she looked at me, not knowing what to do. Then she jumped up and down, hugging me as hard as she could.

She looked at me and said, "Miss Long, I did good!"

To that, I replied something like, "Yes Donna, you certainly did!" She had everyone's attention by now. Her entire class came over and hugged her or slapped her on the back. She stood there smiling the entire time quite proud of herself.

This practice day was so important to all of them because one member had done something she had never been able to accomplish. I think of her now every time Special Olympics is mentioned.

Agnes

Interview #2

December 16, 1998

You mentioned some things last time about responsibilities of students, talk about that.

Many of them are pretty decent at this, they're getting most of the things done that need to be done. Unfortunately we have those who don't think anything is their fault, none of their responsibility is theirs and we also have parents who say, "You'll have to excuse him for this work because I left it in the truck." Well I have a very hard time with this because parents are not the ones who get the grade, they're not the ones who did the work so why should they be expected to have the work? And if the student had the work in the truck, then the student should have gotten it out. And with fifth graders, I'm sorry, but I'm not gonna take that as an excuse. They just need to remember. If I left my work in the house, if I left my work in the car, then, they'd be in trouble. Because they wouldn't have anything to do. Hence, I'd be in bigger trouble than they. We do have a lot of parents who definitely expect their kids to fulfill their responsibilities. We have nightly reading folders where they have to read something like 20 minutes a night, and then every month I raise it by five minutes, and then if they forget it, their mothers will not come to school. They will not bring their homework to them because they realize that's just enabling them. They're trying to teach their kids that you know, if it's due, it's due. It's not my job to bring it to you. I love parents like that because, it's hard on them, I realize, but, it's harder on the kid, when they realize their momma's not gonna do the work for them by bringing it in, or whatever. Some of them realize that if momma didn't bring it, I'm gonna get a zero, so I guess I'd better bring it myself.

What kind of responsibilities do they have at home do you think?

Some of them have nothing! Their mothers do everything for them. Some of them have to quote babysit younger siblings which I think is sad because fifth graders are just children, and they should have no responsibility like that, whatsoever, because most of them are not level headed enough to deal with an emergency. A lot of them say they have to make their own beds, clean their room, a lot of them help with the dishes, a lot of them help cook, even because they want to do that and their mothers let them. But, some other kids, their mothers won't let them do anything because they're afraid they're gonna break something, or they're gonna misplace something, or whatever, so they don't let them do it. So there's a wide range of nothing to adult responsibilities.

What do you notice in the classroom, say with a kid who has adult responsibilities at home? What are they like in the classroom?

They are more responsible most of the time, but, when they forget something, I don't give them a hard time, because it's like, a one time thing. I have one student that's got two younger brothers, she does not baby sit, but she helps her mom out when her mom is sick, and when she does this, then sometimes she forgets to get her reading folder signed.

And that's not a big deal to me because the kid's a good student and she's not being forced to do this. The one's who have no responsibility at home have none here either, practically none, because they don't see it's necessary, even though I've been hammering it since September. I got this class, in September, after having my straight fourth in August. So I had to start all over, basically. But they've heard it for four months, almost four months, so there's no excuse for not knowing what I expect every single day.

What happened with your class?

I now have a split. Fourth grade/ Fifth grade. Mostly fifth.

So you started the year with fourth grade and had fifth graders added?

Basically lost all of my kids but three.
Tell me about that.

"Thppptttt" (laugh);

(laughs) Tell me what happened.

We needed another fifth grade because there were too many, like 26, 27 kids in it. That's too many for a national testing grade and a CRT grade. So we needed a split and I told Leah, the principal, that I would be more than happy to take it, even though I knew it would be really hard, because splits are always hard, doesn't matter what grade it is, they're really hard and quite frankly, because the other three teachers couldn't deal with it. One of them would have the strength to do it, but the other two don't have the experience to do it. And I figure if anybody fails them, it ought to be me. I mean if anybody fails, put it on me because I could probably deal with it better. That's my own egotism here. I had the best class ever in my life that I gave up to do this, so I decided that if I teach fifth next year, I want my kids back. The one's that I had that I really liked. A lot of them, all of the kids I got were new to the school, except for two. So not only did they get displaced from another school or another state, they'd been in their class for two weeks, and they got a new teacher. Most of them were not happy about this. Some of them were happy because they were getting in trouble in their own classes. Well, that did not change when they came to me, because I wasn't going to let them get away with stuff anybody else didn't let them get away with either. And it's been really rough. The kids have been, well, some of the kids have been really obnoxious. Some of them have overpowered the fourth graders. Because it's not an even split. At one time I had five fourth graders, now I'm back down to four. I have fifteen fifth graders because my two new ones are both fifth graders. And, they've taken their time. It's not been fair to the fourth graders. They're learning, but they're not having fun. Which, I always have fun when I do my space unit, I do a shuttle mission, or I do something that has to do with moon rocks, and I do all these great projects, and I don't have time to do any of that, because I have to do fifth grade things also. And the fifth graders are not having much fun, either. For social studies we do projects on revolutionary war and explorers and all that, and we don't have time for that because we have to cover so much material by the

first of March. Which, by the way is the first week of testing which is dumb!

What is CRT?

Criterion Reference Test. They are supposedly in line with our pass objectives. Our kids have to have them in music this year, Art, Social Studies which is broken into Government, History, and Geography, Reading, Math, and Writing Test in February.

This is in addition to Standardized Tests?

Yes, so the fifth graders have two weeks of tests instead of just one, not counting the day they have to do the writing test in February.

Does that happen in Third grade, too?

Third grade only has ITBS

I remember a year that I taught in this district there was a split class. We added a new teacher about a month into the year. Does that happen fairly regularly? You start with a group and think, "OK this is our year, then suddenly it's not?

Yes. That usually happens. And you may not get a split grade level, but there may be enough to get a new teacher. The last, ever since this school's been here, there's been a new class. Because we don't know how the population's going to go. We set up classes we think will be, then if we have an overwhelming number of fourth graders, then we have to get a new teacher. And sometimes it entails getting a split if we don't have the money for it, for a quote new teacher, we get a new class. And most schools have this problem in this city because the kids move so much. Either because of military or because of rent, or because they're unhappy with the school they're in, there's a lot of different reasons. It's a very mobile population.

So the district, say in May, wouldn't know who's going to show up in August?

That's exactly right. Last year we had about 650 kids, 300 of them came after December. We had the same number all year, but we lost half of our population by Christmas. And obviously a whole new group came after Christmas. And most of them were not military. I don't know where those kids came from!

The military families are being transferred to different parts of the country, and transferred in?

Yes.

And the others?

Divorce, going to live with the other parent, moving to be closer to family. Some of them

are moving to get away from family. Any reason you can think of, they're doing it.

Typically, do most families move every year?

Some of them, I had a boy last year, who was put into foster care who had moved three times before he came to me. And then he went to a foster home in another town.

What's that like to get a kid who's already been in four different schools that year?

You don't know where to start. He's not anywhere near where we are in Math, for instance, I always have Math groups. I don't do the same thing for everybody, because that's boring for those who already have the concepts. And too high above the one's who can't do it, so I have groups. And, as an example, one of the new kids I just got yesterday could do what the highest group was doing, but he hasn't done what the lowest group was doing. So, I don't know how I'm gonna get that to him. Because he'll be the only one who hasn't done that chapter. With reading, with whole language it's not a big deal. And now that we're doing accelerated reader, it's definitely not a big deal. They work from their own level, and they do the same skills every body else is doing, they don't have to "catch up."

Now is that on computer?

Accelerated reader? Yes the tests are. We have a huge list of books that are, quote, "accelerated reader books", that we have tests for. The kids read the books, they keep a journal, they keep a log of what they're reading, when they're reading it, how many pages they read. Then they go take a test, they get a paper, cut in half, they give the teacher the top half to record the score, and take the bottom half home. The kids get points, but we're not emphasizing points, we're emphasizing increasing your reading level. They read on their own level based on the tests they take at the beginning of the program. And then the teacher can move their level up or down depending on how they are doing on the tests. Most of the kids love it because they can read what they want to read, they don't have to struggle through a twenty page chapter book that's two levels above them. So reading is easy. Social Studies and Science are real difficult, because the whole state does not teach the same thing at the same time, which to me would be a mistake anyway, because if you do that, then who ever gets the materials first gets them, and nobody else has them. Like from the public library. So it's really hard to catch them up on stuff that you know they're going to be tested for. And unfortunately we have to teach what the test requires. We don't teach the specific items, necessarily, but we know, for example we have to, in fifth grade, get to Westward expansion. We have to do that, and we have two months to do it. And it's practically impossible unless all you do is read the chapter, answer the questions, read the chapter, answer the questions.

And if there's a kid that comes in like now, and he's missed all the explorers because he came from another state, and he may or may not have done the same thing, and he's probably missed most of leading up to the Revolutionary War. A lot of that's very important and he's just going to have to go back and read it himself, I can't catch him up on that. So it's very difficult when you get new kids in, that are not from the

same system as you are in, to get them to where they're supposed to be. And unfortunately, like I said, most of my kids have come from other states. And when we started, most of my fifth graders could not use an encyclopedia, they did not remember how to use a dictionary, had no clue about multiplication tables. In the fifth grade some of them couldn't even add and that really bites in my craw considering I know how hard I work to get my fourth graders ready for the fifth grade for math. And it's real irritating when you get kids who don't know anything for math.

I'm really focusing this study through third grade, but I know third grade does this test, too. What do you think the importance or value of this test are?

Honestly?

Yes

Absolutely nothing. Because these kids who do poorly in the classroom, then get a fifty on the test, they're either good guessers, or they're really lazy. And then you've got your kids who are really excellent students, and they test poorly, because they stress too much over it. Even though we don't emphasize stress at all. We tell them, "We're going to have this day, this day, and this day..." Maybe there's some value to it in identifying kids who are special ed, because you've got numbers there in front of you.

Using it as a screening tool?

But wasting a week just to test kids, when you've got things you've got to teach by the end of the year? That to me is exactly what it is, waste.

Do you think you would teach the same things during the year if you didn't have this test in the spring?

I would teach the same, but I wouldn't have to teach them so fast, and I wouldn't have to rely on them getting it or not getting it in such a short period of time. Because, for instance, we're going to have a Revolutionary War test, and events leading up to the war test, Friday. If they don't get it, there's no time to go back and re-do that section. Because we have to get through the Civil War. Big difference between Revolutionary War and Civil War, it's like a hundred years we have to cover there, and it's not fair to the kids. Because they are not basing, whoever does the test, they're not basing what, what they need to be learning by the end of May, by what they should have learned by the end of March, or the beginning of March because that's two more month's of teaching and there's things on that test the kids can't pass, because there's simply no time to get it in beforehand. And that's not fair. It's not realistic in my opinion.

As a teacher, do you use the test score to assess what your kids know?

Yes we do, actually as grade levels, we take the break down of the skills , because we get this huge detail thing of how many test questions there were on main idea, and how many

kids missed question one, all of that. So we take that and see what did we not teach well? And hopefully, next year we'll do a better job on that section. Or hopefully, we can give that information to the next teachers and say, these kids are really low on main idea. Or these kids are really low in fractions. So that's a good thing, diagnostically it's okay. You can't fix a lot of it and, if they've never been taught this and it's finally sprung on them in fifth grade, right before the test, that's not fair.

Do you think there's real benefit for the child in the tests?

For the kids that are real go getters, the ones who are self motivated, maybe. Because, I don't remember elementary, but I remember in high school, I was surprised at how well I remember stuff. It was a challenge to me. But to kids who don't even want to be in school, they don't value it at all. They just see it as something else they have to do. A lot of the gifted kids, they even get bored with it because they either finish first, or they are so thorough that they don't even finish. Because they want to make sure they have everything exactly right and they'll stay on something until they know the answer they picked is exactly right.

I was surprised to find out that standardized tests were a fairly recent development.

I remember taking them in the second grade. I don't know what or when. I also remember taking them in fourth grade, fifth grade, seventh grade, eighth grade, eleventh grade. We didn't have any so called "At-Risk" schools. They were not considered that where I lived. They were not Title One, I don't think there was such a thing. There may have been, I don't know. I know that we had special ed classes where kids were either in special ed. or they weren't. They didn't get pulled out to go back and forth to different rooms in the building to go to different special ed things.

Talk about inclusion, then, bringing special needs kids into regular classrooms.

For some of them it's a really good idea. For some of them, I think they should be placed in, they should not be included in the regular classroom. When you've got the extremes of kids who are classified as educable mentally retarded, Mentally Handicapped, whatever the term is for the decade, and they're in your class, and you are having to lower everything three or four grade levels to suit them? That is not least restrictive environment. And that's not fair to the class, it's not fair to the student, and it's not fair to the teacher. If there's a space where they can fit in better, that's where they ought to be. Now I've got a couple of LD (Learning Disabled) kids. If they were in full time LD that would be great, but since they're not, they go up there for an hour every day, they do get more one on one attention, which is what they need.

Are there any specific kids you have taught over the years that stand out in your mind?

This one kid I did on my narrative, 1981, I'll never forget her, because I was teaching special ed physical education. I was, at one school I had four classes of trainable, which is what they were called then, and I had another school that was ED/ MR class and

another school was half CP and other physical disabilities and the rest of the school was severely and profoundly retarded, multi handicapped.

So you went to all these places?

Yes, I was a rotating teacher.

So what did the kids do when you weren't there?

Their teachers did PE with them. This one school was a handicapped school so they did activities. We were there, there were two of us teaching. The days we were not there their teachers did PE with them.

So you were the PE teacher for the special needs school?

Yeah, at the school where the TMR's (Trainable Mentally Retarded) were, I went there three days a week, and where the MRED's (Mentally Retarded, Emotionally Disturbed) were, I went to their school two days a week. There was only one adaptive Physical Education teacher in town ,and that was me and there were fifty-some schools. So anyhow, I went to this trainable class and they were gearing up for Special Olympics for basketball and there was a little girl about this tall. Had really thick glasses, she wanted to play basketball. In Special Olympics, no one is denied, and she couldn't even hit the rim. We were practicing and practicing, doing all the different skills you need to do, and I was really frustrated, the ball hit my glasses and broke them, and I looked over at this kid, she's been doing nothing but shooting free throws all day, not hitting anything, the precise moment I looked at her, she hit it. I will never forget this kid. That was the only time she ever did it, but she knew she could do it after she did it one time, and her whole class was so wonderful, That's one thing I noticed about mentally handicapped classes, especially trainable, they may get in fights, but they still love each other, and the kids are so welcome, to make mistakes because the others back them up. And her whole class came over and congratulated her, and every time I see special Olympics, I think of this kid. I can't remember her name.

Thank you for sharing your stories. Please call or e-mail if you think of anything else you want to say.

APPENDIX B
Julia's Interviews and Written Protocol

JULIA
Interview #1
December 2, 1998

What do you remember about teaching in inner city classrooms over the years?

Oh I remember heroic children, children who came to school when most adults I know couldn't have had the courage to do so. My memories reach back into the fifties so we're talking when there was no free and reduced lunch, no welfare as we know it, no unemployment compensation, it was a desperate era for a lot of children. They were hungry and they didn't even have enough money to pay the three cents for the milk we had as a treat, we didn't have hot lunches, they had to go home for lunch. So many of them didn't even have homes to go to. So when I look at what we provide today, the plight of these kids is much different than the plight of children, thirty or forty years ago. So many more opportunities, and hopefully they're taking advantage of them, because there are some wonderful programs for kids.

So when they didn't have money for the milk, they didn't get any?

They didn't get any. Absolutely, three or four kids could have it, others didn't.

Was that hard for you as a teacher?

Sure. It's always hard to see that kind of deprivation. Today, you know we have different programs, but we still have a lot of problems, no question, maybe even more, but schools, are trying so hard to fill the gaps that others in society have not been able to.

What are some things the schools have done?

Well the lunch program, the after school programs, the before school programs, the teachers themselves get together and buy clothes for children. We have social welfare agencies, not necessarily all public, we have private agencies that come to us. Jrunior Service League helps us. We have volunteers that come into the building. I really do have tremendous hope for public education, I know a lot of people are nay sayers and would like to see the end of it, but I certainly don't see that, and I hope I never see the end of public education. There was very little. It was what we called welfare, it was not, it wasn't welfare, there's been several different names over my career that we've called public assistance, but, not many people weren't eligible. There wasn't funding, there were no books like we have today. The education for schools was much less.

Do you mean text books?

Text books, supplies, etc, the government and the American people have been very

generous in funding education.

What different places have you taught?

I taught in Providence Rhode Island, and I've been a parent volunteer, PTA and room mother in places like North Carolina, New York, Rhode Island, Oklahoma, and I've taught here the last twenty five years.

This school has a large military population, do the children travel a lot with their parents?

Some of them do. Some of our kids never get out of the neighborhood unless we're able to take them, so we do need to be able to provide those things for them.

I remember when I was teaching we read the story, *Corduroy* and kids in the 1980's had never seen an escalator.

We live in such a flat area, we don't have too many second floors.

Have you worked with children who were being abused?

Yes, the last year I was at Thompson we had a student assistant group where certain teachers were trained, then we would facilitate counseling groups, and many girls came back and told me of situations, and many had happened while they were in elementary school. I think that may have been one reason why I made the decision to come back to elementary school, when this started they were in early elementary. I thought, is there something I can do to raise their self esteem so that they will be able to say no, or they'll be able to tell, before all the damage is done. Some of them actually were suicidal because it was so hard for them to deal with what had happened. And that is hard, and you do have to tell. And it is hard to console a child whose worried about their own parent or family member. It's very hard.

Is there any part of teaching city kids that surprised you?

Well I think, are we talking about city kids as opposed to rural kids?

Especially inner city

Well I've never taught rural kids so it's hard to make a comparison. I can say that what I think I see, having taught kids who are desperately poor and kids who are well to do that they have same problems, to think that a rich kid, they were dealing with many of the same home situations as my kids who didn't have as much where-with-all and money to do with, and that didn't actually surprise me, it did surprise me to see that they had many of the same problems.

I think that's an important distinction that just because we're talking about city or urban kids, that doesn't mean necessarily poor.

Absolutely not, even in this school, while we have some preponderance of at or below the poverty level, we also have some relatively affluent. Having taught in the two major junior high schools in this area, we teach kids from all aspects of society. We teach doctors and lawyer kids, we teach kids whose mothers are in jail. They can all be in the same class at the same time.

Tell me about working with kids whose parents are in jail.

That's tough, because usually they don't want you to know. We did a writing activity the first year we were in this building. It was an I AM poem, and the little boy wrote . . . he told, finally, what was wrong. He started to read his poem, then he just broke down and cried, desperately cried, and then he confided in me that he was living with his grandmother because his father and his mom were both in jail, and he was afraid that she would continue to go back because there were underlying other problems that she was doing as well, yes, it was terrible. It was hard.

So it's not just not whatever he has to go home to at night but also worrying about the future?

Umhum. You know, the amazing thing, I do have to say this looking back over the years I have had kids in this situation, and I do have to say that many of them do make it. As devastating as it is, I still and I do have to say, too, that now I'm having kids of the students I taught and the students I'm teaching now are in much better shape than their parents were. Their parents are doing a better job parenting than their own parents did to them. Even though some of them still are in tough shape. Uh, academically, they're doing better. I can think of at least five, right here in this fifth grade whose parents I've taught. They're all doing better, remarkably better.

What are the reasons for that?

I think a lot of our social programs are working. I really do. I think teachers are better at what we do. I think we're more conscious of treating kids with a great deal of respect. I think the things we've done over the years, programs have helped. There's a lot of problems out there, but what I see on a personal level, the kids are better off.

What programs are you thinking of?

Well, probably aid to dependent children. All the things we do at the holidays, programs that are not necessarily public assistance but private things, things we do that show we have confidence and respect for families. The counseling things we've done in the high schools and junior highs, the making kids aware of the needs of their children, even though they had children when they were way too young, they seem to be investing as much as they possibly can. They're more aware of what their kids may need.

And then one more question that I would like to ask today, thinking back on your teacher

preparation program, like at the university or college, do you think that prepared you for what you found in the class rooms?

My teacher preparation was excellent, absolutely excellent. I graduated from the Rhode Island College of Education, it's Rhode Island College now and it had originally been a teacher Normal school way back at the turn of the century, it was very progressive. It had a laboratory school right on the campus with the very best teachers teaching in it, so you taught lessons from the time you were a junior to a classroom, you were critiqued, and you were critiqued with a loving hand, but every little thing that you managed to miss, as far as even using the wrong pronoun, the teacher would correct you, in a loving way or however, in front of the whole class. Your class would sit and watch you teach. There might be five people in that group that watch you teach and you'd get back together again and they'd say what they thought you did well and if there were anything that needed to be added and it really helped me hone my skills. I think I was ready, when I hit the classroom I was ready.

So if you were going to make recommendations for other teacher prep programs, what would you recommend?

Well, I had a rigorous schedule of academic classes and I had a minor which I think a lot of kids graduating from college don't seem to have, they don't seem to have a specialization in anything. I had a minor in English, which I think has really put me in good stead. I think every teacher needs that, one area of focus that they've really done in-depth work in. I also think that some work in the classroom needs to be done. Teaching is not an exact science but there's enough research out there that shows us what are good practices and what are not good practices and mal-practice in education today should not be allowed because we have enough people that know that certain behaviors lead to more learning. So I do think that teacher preparation classes are good, but I also believe in strong academics.

Teacher preparation needs to have a strong focus on academics?

YES, absolutely.

What about dealing with these kids whose parents are in jail?

Same way all of us do with love and understanding and just knowing that's part of society and this is a multi-faceted profession. You are going to be exposed to many children and it's a tough job, but, those things happen in our society; if you read it in the paper, it's happening in a classroom. Whatever you've read in the paper, some child's going to school from that family today. Somewhere, whether it's a brother, a grandparent, a brother-in-law, someone is hurting, and chances are if you ask in a writing lesson. . . We did something about robbery, most of the kids raised their hand, they know someone who has had a robbery. A tragedy because you've lost someone you really cared for in your family, most of the kids are going to raise their hand. I don't necessarily have to ask each and every story to know there's a lot of hurting going on and

I don't think that's just in inner city schools, although it's more prevalent. If you can teach them somehow to leave their troubles outside the classroom, and that's what I had to work at a lot. I went so far as to take a piece of paper and I told a girl, when you walk in this room, and you are in a bad mood, I want you to write what it is who you're mad at, take the piece of paper, roll it up in a ball and throw it in the garbage and see if you can get rid of those bad thoughts, just for today. And you know, writing is a tremendous tool for expressing emotion, and it really helped that particular student, really helped that student, it was miraculous. It took me a while to get to that point where I didn't think they were mad at me. You tend to take it personally.

So, there's more going on in teaching than state pass objectives?

AMEN! A lot more. We want to have people academically. . . I will say something about the testing because on the fifth grade, it's terrible, it's too much. I came back to elementary teaching in the 60's in third grade, I was shocked at what we expected third graders to know. Many things they are simply not developmentally ready to tackle. And so we wonder why kids are falling behind. I've watched the curriculum being pushed down and down. And I see it with my grand kids, things they're expected to do when they should have spent more time learning how to do certain developmental tasks. Then we're having kids come up LD, ADHD, where if we'd taken them slowly, developmentally, by the time they reach third grade, they would be a whole lot better off to learn the tougher skills! But we pushed it down, now the cursive in the second grade. And children are suffering the effects of their mother's drug abuse, now research is beginning to show it's the father too, things just drop out of their little computers.

I know you have to go now. Thank you, I'll see you again in a couple of weeks.

JULIA

Written Protocol

Written Between Interviews One and Two

Terri was a tiny little thing. All excitement - with that urgent need to please people and to be loved. She sat in my class every day and dutifully did her lessons. She sat close to my podium at Thompson Junior High. We grew to be student and teacher friends.

One day, as Christmas neared, she brought a book to school and asked if I would read it to the class. It was a trade book, the kind one finds on the aisle at Wal-Mart; a Disney book, not particularly well written but mass produced for profit. It was quite young for our seventh grade class but since these were remedial readers and it was a Christmas story, it would probably be okay. I told her to leave it and I would try to find time.

Days passed and she reminded me often. One day she came in so excited that we had to take time to listen to her tell about her family situation. After many years of separation, her mom and dad had found each other over the holidays and would move to Arkansas to be reunited. The others all shared her excitement because most of these kids came from fatherless backgrounds.

That day I read her book. I think now it was her only book. I kept thinking impatiently, as I read the story, that my time could be better spent reading something more meaningful like O Henry's *The Gift*. We turned the overhead lights off and a small strand of lights twinkled on a silver tree. Light came through the north window and illuminated the colored crèche scene assembled on the glass. It seemed a magic time for all of us who bathed in the glow of Christmas and the words of a Christmas story. Her face radiated happiness and I read to the end.

We parted that week. Her mom and the younger sister and brother took extra time before they left to climb the stairs to say goodbye to me. Transfer papers were prepared and clutched in momma's hands. She was radiant with the thoughts of going to see her long lost love, the father of her children, estranged for so long, now back in their lives for the holidays. We hugged and when they left my heart was full for this little family who would soon have two parents to nurture them.

Christmas came and went for our family of six. My four children loved this holiday time and I raced through my days trying to fulfill the myriad of chores for the holidays. With the New Year underway, school once again began. Some students had moved, new ones took their place. I picked up the newspaper one morning as the cold Southwestern wind whipped around outside and read of a tragedy in Arkansas. The dread of recognition came over me. Terri and her whole family had perished in a tragic trailer fire. There were no survivors and no one knew of any kin in either state. The little church in that town was struggling to pay for the funeral and a reporter in our town picked up the story.

How precious our time was together. The time I took from my teaching agenda gave Terri so much joy. I remind myself that I'm teaching kids-not curriculum and these kids are only with us for such a short time. Somewhere in the lesson plans, make time for nurture and care. Turn down the lights, take a break and enjoy your time together. Let

the magic of the classroom be yours. I cannot change the outcome of this story or stop the tears that still fall as I tell it but I'm glad I changed my lesson plan that day and took time to please a little girl who in her short life tried so hard to please her teachers.

JULIA
Interview #2
December 16, 1998

Tell me a little bit about your job here.

I'm a writing teacher. I'm paid with Title One funding. Because we have so many free and reduced lunches, we have Title One funding. And so the faculty, actually the Title One staff, said since I had done so much writing in the past with the Oklahoma Writing Project and so on, why didn't I concentrate on that aspect because there were three or four of us at the time. And so now the other Title One teacher does Reading Recovery with the younger grades. And initially I did sixth grade, then they instituted the fifth grade writing test. And now my focus is on fifth grade and fourth grade. And then after the writing test in February, I will focus on the lower grades. And I will do some work with sixth grade and I will do some, since I'm a reading specialist, I will tutor some third graders before the test. The second semester is reading.

To what extent is what teachers do driven by the testing?

I'm sure that my job, focusing on the fifth grade is because of the test. What I do is basically the same that I would do if I had my own classroom teaching writing, I just do it on a more intense basis with fifth graders. As we get closer to the test, I will, in fact when we come back in January, I will show the kids what they'll be asked on the test, I mean what they'll be graded on, which is holistic and mechanics. The greatest part of the grade is on the holistic score: beginning, middle, end, sticking to the topic and we will really emphasize that. And we'll also begin to do a five paragraph theme with them, so they know how to do that, and how to go from one topic to another, how to make transitions, so that part of it, I would be doing anyhow, but we will definitely focus on the language of the test, as far as they're going to be assessed. They need to know what they'll be assessed on. If they don't, you know, what's the sense of testing?

That's my next question, what is the sense of testing?

Well, obviously the legislature thinks it's important. That this test is a measure of what fifth graders can do. I think they are wise in so far as that we do need to test periodically to see that we are... However, I think it is a disgrace that we are testing, we are focusing on certain grades with the test and they are so pressured. Fifth grade will take a criterion referenced test, to reiterate, will now even take a fine arts test, so to me, maybe it should be spread out a little. I'm sure they have their reasons, why they think that it's imperative to test solely in third, fifth, and seventh, but I do think that it does take a lot of the fun out of teaching. Because teachers feel so pressured.

What about the kids? What's the value of testing for them?

Well, I think some of the tests are way too hard, I think sometimes they don't reflect what... I realize that the test people who have made the test are Oklahoma people,

Oklahoma based, but when I came back, and I think I said this before, but when I came back and I began teaching third grade again, after having not taught, I taught Jr. high, I was shocked at what we expected third graders to know, many times what they were not developmentally ready for, and that's a terrible thing. But accountability is good. I think one thing that I would say and I intend to begin to start writing some letters, that all these tests that everyone's in such disgrace about, there's an article in the paper about Massachusetts. We look at the teachers, we look at the kids, let's start looking at the tests. Let's start looking at the tests and seeing what those questions are. Because some of them are just totally, they're very hard for me to do, and I consider myself to be a well educated person. They are not always only judging content, they are judging your ability to read obscure material! I don't think that's fair.

I think one thing that the news stories don't point out is that tests change.

And someone's always going to be low. They design the tests so there will always be failure. And a lot of regular people don't realize that. And teachers, maybe we don't do a good job of hollering loud enough about it. We just close our door, come in our classroom and try our best to do our job. Maybe, you know, and everyone gets mad at NEA because they're lobbying, and they talk about kids and they talk about teachers and they get mad at them. Who is gonna talk for kids? Why shouldn't educators be the ones?

(Child, Marlena, enters the room and begins working on the computer)

Last time you talked about heroic kids. Can you tell me about a heroic kid?

This is one (indicating Marlena) this is one she won't let... She is a perfect example of a child who will not let you ignore her. If I'm not here sometimes she will cry. She will cry. She will cry until the teacher searches me out and finds me. She knows what days I am here, what days she can come in and work. Initially we met together because she didn't want to wear glasses, and counselor and the principal were not in the building. They were in the building, but they were out of pocket. And so the teacher said, she's just so upset, can you help her? So we chatted, and talked, now she has become my buddy. She has found a mentor. And she now comes in, we read together, she writes on the computer, and she is reading beautifully. And that's just one encounter. One child. She's a child who demands that kind of attention. Even though she comes from a family where there's foster children, she's being brought up by her grandmother. She is going to try to make it. And it's, I must say I think, a very challenging set of circumstances.

Do you have students taking medications?

Well, I'm not in the classroom, as you know right now, but at first I thought we were over medicating, then I saw a special on ADD and ADHD on one of the educational channels. Then I began to realize that was not my decision to make. And that the implication of a child not being on medication when he needed to be on medication was

that he was missing so much education. Missing all social interaction. Then I said to myself, you know, that's an important thing. Many of the people who are in prison today, had they had some kind of a medication that would have allowed them to attend better, to what was going on in the early grades would not have fallen so far behind in school. So where does it begin and where does it end? Is it a circle that goes round and round? And if a doctor says a child's got a disability and needs that medication, then who am I to question it? I certainly see the difference in children who are on medication as far as their ability to learn in school. I also think that sometimes the children with certain learning styles that are different than those learning styles that we had in school may be diagnosed as having hyperactivity thing when it's just really they need to be in a classroom where they have more hands on, more times to get up, more breaks, more things done that fit them. And most kids really don't have, you know, a type one learning personality where they can sit and learn from worksheets and sit still all day. Most of us don't have that kind of learning style.

We could ask, Do we get kids ready for school or schools ready for kids? I also wanted to ask about the magnet school program that you used to work with.

Well, we did a lot of things that now many schools in the district are going to. We did some portfolio kinds of things, we did a lot of things with learning styles. We definitely planned our lessons built around the model. Either the Dunn model or the Gregor model, one of the models that had to do with making sure children did not just get instruction in their own learning style, but we planned things in the day that would hit every... different kids, their learning style. Now Dunn defiantly said that a child should only be taught to his or her own learning style, which is very difficult for those of us in the classroom. But, you know, the more we work towards that model, we can try to implement activities that will help specific kids and be aware of that. So that was one thing, those were several things the magnet program did.

We were very flexible as far as if a child wasn't getting along in a classroom, we were very flexible about staffing, with the teachers and moving him to another classroom. And sometimes with really particularly difficult kids, we did that several different times. We were hoping, for one thing, to unlock the thing that would help the child, another thing, it was too much of a burden for that child to be in the same class because they're very distracting to other children and it's not really fair for them to have this one dysfunctional kid in their class all the time, the kind who ruined or spoiled a lot of things, so we were very flexible that way. And we had evening sessions where parents were able to come with their children and we tried to have conferences at times when it was more convenient for the parents and I see other schools are starting to do that.

What about building community?

Well, having the school open in the evening. We have the daycare now. Schools have just changed dramatically from when I started teaching in the fifties. Now we're looking toward schools as being community centers.

What are some other innovative things you did as a staff with the magnet school?

Oh, we went over grades, talked about different ways that we felt would work with different children, talked about curriculum, planned lessons, tried to integrate our curriculum with one another, tried to plan things where I, my expertise was in the area of writing, although certainly in every area, I felt I was in every area, but the teachers would like me to do the writing assignment. There were teachers who were very strong in visual arts, and they would do the activity that we did with that, so we did rotations around holidays, one teacher would do a writing, one teacher would put the book together with the kids, one teacher would cook with the kids, so that we built on each others strengths, and we tried to.

How did you find time for that?

We would come in early in the morning and staff. The magnet program began a little later than other schools because of the bus situation. But we just, we were paid an increment to be at that school, and we would come earlier in the morning.

One of the things that stands out in my memory was the sense of community with the children. The daily opening, children taking care of each other and things like that.

Yes, the opening was good in the beginning but I think it was overdone. What the kids needed, many of the kids could not attend in that big situation. So I think for a while there we spent too much time on that community activity, where so many kids were left out, because it was too big a group. But, I think at first, when it was kept to a minimum time something like that should be 10 to 15 minutes, whatever it is, not to go on for any length of time because too many kids were missing out on what I thought was instructional time, and the individual instruction that they needed. Ah, but yes, that was good and also built on the strengths of different teachers because different teachers would do the opening and one teacher might focus on a certain poem or story and another teacher would do something different. We all got a chance to do that. So that was a strength.

Is there anything else you would like to talk about?

Can't think of anything, you've covered anything.

APPENDIX C
Tom's Interviews and Written Protocol

TOM
Interview #1
December 2, 1998

I'd like to talk about teaching, and what it's like teaching inner city kids. Because you're a principal now, I hope you will be able to reflect back on your experiences. Tell me a little about your classroom and your teaching.

When I was teaching in an inner city type situation?

Yes

Well, it was a very diverse classroom. I would say that most of the students were low socioeconomic. As a matter of fact, we didn't calculate every year, but I know one year we calculated and we had well over 80% who were on free and reduced lunch. So the poverty rate within that school was very high. Very little parental support in many cases. Several reasons why, one, parents having to work all the time, both parents, just to make ends meet. Another, because students have experienced quite a bit of failure and felt like all that they were having to do with the teacher was always negative. Or, you know, otherwise, maybe they just weren't home at all, so there are several reasons as to why, but, very little parent involvement with the kids. Very needy as far as needing hugs all the time, needing those little silver boxes, kinds of praises, and nice things dropped their way a lot.

What do you mean by silver boxes?

Well I got that phrase from a book. There's a book called *Silver Boxes*. It just means you drop these little silver boxes to people, which is like a little gift. The book is an analogy of a little silver wrapped gift with a big silver bow on top, and what that is just dropping little nice things. It could be monetary or it could be just continual praise, things like that. It's just positives, which you can give someone. So basically they were just in need of a lot of praise, encouragement, things like that. However, the academic level was very low. Many of them had experienced failure. Often times were for different reasons, again. One was they were caring for younger siblings, as opposed to maybe being able to do what we would call a typical child's things, which would be to play and things like that. Also, it may have been you just couldn't get their mind on school, it was always somewhere else.

Some of it was because of the environment that they were raised in. Maybe they had not been able to actually... Many of them may have been alcohol syndrome babies, or crack babies. Things like this where their development was just not completely there, whether it be mental, physical, typically it was a situation that was a cognitive problem. Just a lot of poor processing, so academically they were often times very low. It was, the minority rate was high again we did calculate that every year, just as a comparison, I

can't really remember every year, but usually it was somewhere around sixty five per cent minority rate.

Non-white children?

Yes, non-white that could include anything, other than white.

When you were talking about lack of success or negative experience with school, were you talking about parent or kids?

Parents. Typically, parents would not want to be involved because they were dealing with the negatives, meaning the teacher calling and saying, "Well, they got in trouble today for this, or they are failing this." It was always a negative it seemed like to them from the school, so they just chose not to participate at all. Just, if I don't have to see it, hear it, talk about it, then it's just not there.

So to them, school wasn't a positive place?

Right. Exactly, which is one of the things we wanted to change.

What did you do to try to do that?

Well, just what I believe any good teacher would do, to actually encourage the students to look for the positives and find what they can do, and not, I think, by the time they progressed, even only two or three grades, the teacher was teaching often times a level where they "should be" instead of where they actually were, so they were just continually getting further behind, more lost. And one thing they just thought was wonderful was to find out we could back up and find out specifically where that student's needs began and just start teaching at that point. That was probably the best thing we could possibly do. Just because they felt like it was over their head. Everything was over their head.

So typical teachers might say, "OK we're in third grade, we are going to do third grade work whether the students were ready or not?"

Yes, And a lot of times, in my opinion, it's not because it's a bad third grade teacher, but it's because there's so much pressure on the teacher to really get those third grade objectives taught, that they're just really trying to cover that, while, meanwhile, this student who didn't even understand the second grade objectives is lost. His or her needs were obviously just to back way up and in our situation we felt like we wanted to start where that student was. So just lots of praise, lots of encouragement. Try to call their parents, often times they didn't have a phone, but we'd send notes home, whatever that would tell them, "Johnny did this today, it was a wonderful experience." We would also work to find positives for the parents. Try to catch them doing some really nice things.

What kind of response did you get from parents?

We always had a wonderful response. And by the end of the school year, and we took these kids in, only for a school year, they came to us for a year, then they left, in one of the situations I taught in. In another situation it wasn't that way, but in those situations, by the end of the school year, we always had more parent participation, we always had parents come in and say, "This is the first time my student has actually wanted to go to school!" We did compare, we went to each one of the student's home schools and got their attendance rates and compared it to their attendance rate the year they were in our program, and our attendance rate was much higher every time for those students that it was at other times, so we felt like we were making some gains. Just making them want to be at school.

Tell me more about the program you're referring to.

Well it was developed in the early nineties, I believe in ninety, or ninety-one. It was developed for the purpose of catching the students who were falling through the cracks. It was actually an alternative program. We are very familiar with alternative education today, not as much then as we are today. It was kind of a pioneer for the early grades. They had already had some alternative programs in other places in the high schools, but not much in the younger grades, which is where I taught. It was just basically a program to say, "We don't want to wait until these students are in junior high to find out they are so far behind that they want to drop out. We want to catch them and make school a positive experience, so they can continue to find school a positive experience from then on.

The initial project was supposed to be, "let's start with one grade, and then from this, make a full-blown magnet school that would house Kindergarten through twelfth grade. There has been some movement toward that but the program's not necessarily the same as it was. We also wanted to take the approach of preventing problems instead of being punitive alternative site where they go after they've already gotten into trouble. We wanted to save that, we wanted to create some positive experiences that would prevent the need for a punitive situation. We tried to do all kinds of positive approaches. Just anything that would make them enjoy school.

Talk a little about what the physical setting was like for this program.

It changed over the years because of the facilities. We were in three different sites over seven years, I believe. I was there six years, and it was a seven year program. We were in one building and had a fire, then we moved to a church, and then to an empty building. It was, what we tried to do was make the classrooms an open situation that was sort of closed in, we had our own classroom, but there were extensions, such as large doorways, which we did have in both of the school sites. We tried to make it an inclusive program, rather than exclusive. If there was a student that was not progressing in my class, we felt like maybe I didn't have the impact on him that maybe I should have, or the desired response that we were expecting from him, we would switch students around so the child might find another classroom, where the students would interact with him better

or the teacher would be more interactive. So it wasn't, "This is my student." or "These students are my class and everyone stay away from us." It's really a team effort, we really tried to create a betterment for each student so it was very inclusive. The classrooms had sets of computers in each one. Originally we had five computers in each classroom, then a lab with thirty computers in it. Then, because we went down to four classrooms instead of five, we had a few more computers. Maybe six or seven in each classroom. We weren't able to provide for as many students, but we did have more technology and resources for the students we did have.

How did you feel about technology in your classroom?

It was fantastic, it was phenomenal. It was, because of what I recognized, the students who had already experienced failure and like we said, many of them were from the inner city. The majority of them were from inner city, low socioeconomic places, so technology wasn't something they had in their home. Technology wasn't something that was in most schools at that time. Even if they did, it was just one or two computers here and there and the teachers weren't able to get everyone on the computer. A lot of kids who finished first could use the computer. Well it was never these students, because they had already experienced this failure. Basically they were in a catch twenty-two where they were never able to use any technology in their school or at home, then they came to our program where they just had it at their fingertips. Everyday we went to the lab for forty minutes, then they also had use of the ones in the classroom; each one of them probably had a half-hour each day. So it was well over an hour a day on a computer per student. It was amazing, by the end of the year they were much more computer literate than I was. That's not necessarily saying much, but they just had a year and that's all they had. It made them excited about school. It made them want to be there. I felt like technology was really important in our program because the kids, who had just had no access to it, were able to come in and have multiple opportunities. It really enhanced their learning because we were able to put programs on there that were at their level. plus we could group activities that everyone did. We could do it either way, which we did. That was a nice situation. So I felt the technology was a benefit.

How old were these kids?

Well, they were in third grade, but during my time there I had a student as young as seven, because he had started school overseas in a DODS (Department of Defense Schools) program and had started school early, very early. He turned eight shortly after he started third grade, but I did have him at seven. And then I had students as old as thirteen. And he had been in another school system and had failed at least twice. And so he was thirteen years old and still in third grade.

So we're talking about a six-year age span in a single grade level?

As a matter of fact I had those two students the same year, which was (laugh).

You said there was a fire. How did that affect your class?

It's funny to say, but I'll say it. It was probably the best experience they could have, because, to this day, when I look back at classes that I've taught, there was never quite a bond as those students. They were so compassionate toward each other. They were, I don't know, they didn't assume that everything would be there, they realized that there was a loss and that even though there were some gains, we were able to buy some things again from insurance money, things we could put back in the classroom. They realized that this could all be gone, and so when they came back, they had some emotional ties to things that were lost. So we had to make so many adjustments. We moved into a large room and there were four classes and our principal said, "OK, you four will meet in these two rooms." Well, we did that for about a month, it was . . . disastrous. And so we were able to make some other rooms available to make a better situation there. But because of all those changes in that year, students really just created quite a bond and after it was all over, in the midst of it, was really often times stressful, but now that I look back, those are the kids probably that remember me the most. Remember our school and the situation. They're the ones that talk about the gains that they made. They're the ones that call me still to tell me they're on the honor roll in their school. Today I would say it was a very positive experience.

I really think that's another study that needs to be done. I felt the same way when my school burned down.

Did you feel the same way?

I learned what was not important. Before I thought my "stuff" was very important to teaching. When it was gone, and I found out you can go on anyway. That really changed how I thought about teaching.

You don't need a lot of stuff.

(pause)

Was there any part about teaching inner city kids that surprised you?

Surprised me? Yes. Surprised some people, maybe not. Surprised me, yes, First of all, to preface it, I grew up in a small town school, so out of street wise information, that I knew, I didn't know until I heard a little in junior high, a little more in high school. We would drive into the larger towns on Friday nights and just hang out. So I didn't experience knowledge of many street things until I was much older, and a lot of that I didn't know at all. Then I started teaching in this inner city school and I saw third graders who flashed gang signs, who would say phrases that I would have no idea what they meant, I would find out, after investigation, that they were things that only someone very streetwise would know. Those things shocked me the first couple of years.

After that, I realized this was their life. I also had to realize this angered me, not the students, but just that they had to be in this situation. I felt sorry for them. Then I realized after a couple of years that my job was to help them work with what they had to

create something better in the future, as opposed to feeling sorry for them in their situation because they didn't want that. At first I thought that's what they need, that's what they want, but it wasn't what they wanted. I had to come to a point to work with that, to work with kids who knew gang signs when they were six and seven years old. Who took care of younger siblings. They were responsible for washing their own clothes, for feeding themselves; they had such a high level of responsibility. Often times we forget that because they come to school at such a low academic level, we think, we tend to get the idea, "What do they know?" They know a lot, they are caring for themselves, they are caring for others, and they're so responsible at such a young age that I personally believe, and of course it's just an opinion, that it's part of their academic problem. Their brain can only hold so much at a time, can only take on so much new information. Their responsibility factor was so high. And that's another thing that surprised me in the beginning. I think those were the big surprises.

Tell me what you mean when you use the words "street wise".

Students who knew...well street wise is just knowing like I said gang signs, knowing... They knew about things like sex. They knew explicitly what it was about, not necessarily what it's about, well what I believe it's about...They knew the process. They had seen it. Some of them had experienced it, which was a shocking situation to me, especially when you talk about third grade. Street wise in the sense that they knew about and had taken certain types of drugs, that to me, my thinking was that's what they do in downtown New York City or Los Angeles. We don't have that kind of thing here in the Southwest. My eyes were opened to realize these things were happening in their homes. Their parents may have allowed them to join in. And typically, that was one thing, typically the kids that I had who had those types of experiences, it was typically not behind anyone's back. That situation was absolutely surprising to me. So I guess by streetwise I'm just saying things that go on, kind of in that underworld with sex and drugs and you know they knew about prostitution, they knew all about it. Many of them had siblings that were involved with that. Some of them had visions of becoming a prostitute. Just a knowledge of things that I didn't know about until I was much older.

What was it like when kid's family values were different than yours as a teacher?

Oh that's a tough one. That's tough because what I realized that as much as I wanted it to change, my purpose couldn't be to change that student or to necessarily even change the situation they were in. I felt like my job was to do what I thought was best, and sometimes that was a different ethic than they had at home, talk to them about why I feel like it should be that way. You know stealing was nothing to many of them. However, if they had something stolen, it became something different. And so we had to do a lot of comparisons. We had to do a lot of role play of what your reaction is, because somebody's value system is that it's okay to steal and I feel like I want them to not continue in that value system, the only thing I can do is to show them why I believe that that value system may be a little distorted, with out actually saying, "That's stupid." "Don't be that way." Well then I've done nothing but say, "You're a bad person." "Everything about your situation is bad." Then I have excluded that student. And that's

one thing I had to learn through the years, that even though my value system was different from the one being taught in their home, I could not exclude them in the process of teaching them what was right. So that was quite a challenge, because the beliefs are strong. "It's my way or the highway." Well, we can give on a lot of things, but values are an area where most of us don't want to give very much. It wasn't that I would give into their value system, but I would have to teach why this, I felt like this particular system may be, you know...(pause)

Did you feel like an outsider?

Most definitely. My first year of teaching I was a third grade teacher. Before I joined the alternative program, my students were right there in the neighborhood. As I shared, the minority rate was sky high. And one thing I had to do, because my students didn't get on a bus, they walked home. Well, we had several junior high students who'd get off on a bus stop near our school and go hang out across the street. Our kids would get out of school, walk across the street, and they would beat them up. So one thing I found myself doing every day was walking these kids home. And there were five or six kids that we'd walk down the street, we'd just walk them home. Because otherwise, they were just going to get nailed everyday. And they appreciated it. However many people along the way, many parents included, were because I didn't live there. It really was not a...had nothing to do with my race. It was just that I was not from that area. My value system was different and they were well aware of it. And that teachers were often times more of an enemy than a support system. Not on purpose, but it just tended to happen sometimes. So my presence just walking down the street angered some parents. It really angered the kids who wanted to beat the little kids up. I think that I was considered an outsider, however, what I feel good about is that I feel like before each year was not nearly as much of an outsider. Because I feel like I had gained some trust that the parents knew I was really on their side. The parents knew I was really on their side. And not only me, but other teachers as well.

How did you know they were angry with you being in the neighborhood?

They would yell out their door.

Oh.

As a matter of fact, one of the parents that really got angry with me, it was the parent of one of the kids that I walked home everyday, and her particular situation was a racial problem. She told me she didn't want a whitey walking her son home everyday. And I mean there's no response to that. At that point, I'm not going to get into it. This boy is... He's in need of somebody to take care of him. And that parent's perspective, as I began to think about it, to look on the other side was "If he's going to survive, then probably the last thing he needs to do is have his teacher walk him home". But to get beat up, get a few slugs in, gain a little respect . . . Do you know what I mean?

The conflicting values again?

Right. It was a conflict of values, because to me what I was doing was 100% right. But to this parent, and she didn't particularly say this, but I felt like it was a "I'm in this neighborhood," there's just a hierarchy and to move yourself up that hierarchy, it's through physical confrontation. It's just the way it was. I was stepping in that and causing some problems. Even to her, in my protection of her son, I was doing something that was wrong.

What was the child's response?

He wanted me to walk him home. He and I had a pretty good relationship. And actually, I'm not going to say this parent and I had a good relationship, ever, necessarily, however, the beginning of the school year, she refused to ever speak to me, come to the school, anything. By the end of the year she was asking me, "What to we need to do for the next grade?" It wasn't a nice "Hi, how are you doing?" situation, but there was communication. So, the student was always, "Mr. Landon, please take me home." So what do you do when a kid is crying and wanting you to walk him home? Sometimes I would walk him within a block of his house and I would watch the rest of the way. There were five or six of them. Many of the parents were very responsive. They understood what was going on. They appreciated it. Of course this is another place where the value system conflicts. "OK, why aren't you coming up here to get the?" That's what I felt like should have happened. And the parents didn't even think twice about that.

I remember when I first started teaching, struggling with what I thought the parent ought to be doing.

Ummhum

But my feeling, over time, is that parents really do want what's best for their kids, at what ever level they are capable.

And sometimes, I also figured out, and this was through a parent, after I'd gotten into the magnet program, and I felt like she spoke volumes for people, and she just said, "I'm not educated." I didn't even finish high school. I certainly don't have any college background; I come and talk to you. When she said "you" she was talking about teachers, I come and talk to a teacher; they talk so far above my head. I have no idea what they are talking about. They tell me to do all these things at home; I have no idea what these things are. They are really not explained very thoroughly. I go home frustrated and mad. The teacher is frustrated with me, because I don't understand. She said I never have a good experience, so I don't come. This was a conversation on the phone. Basically she was telling me that, no, she was not going to come to a parent conference. Well she did. But it was a situation where I thought, if you want a parent to be intimidated by a teacher just simply because they have some form of education, they know that's the teacher who puts all these red marks on my kids paper. So what are they going to think when I'm not speaking correctly? When I don't know exactly what they are talking about? And if I can't sign my name on a piece of paper when they want me

to... I don't know how. All those things. Through the years I also began to realize, just like you, I think generally they do want what's best for their kids. However many times they feel like they just can't do it. And so they avoid it. And maybe we've created part of that problem. Probably more than maybe. We've to some degree tried to become a little too elite to try to sound as if we are educated. And we should. But we should also recognize when a parent has no idea what we are talking about. We should speak to their needs. I'm not going to say we're 100% at fault, but I think we've created parts of the problem.

In interactions?

Yes, there's just a communications problem. I think that many good teachers bridge that communication gap and do a really nice job.

It was nice that that parent was able to first of all figure out what it was, then be able to share that with you.

Right. And sometimes I think I even had some parents have difficulty in these particular settings because the divorce rate was just phenomenally high. The kids almost always lived with mom. Men were usually ... you know...bucket scum to many of these women who were left, hadn't seen their ex-husband, or whomever; the father of their children, hadn't sent a dime, and that rate was pretty high, so here I am, a man teacher, well, you know...

Men are evil and you're a man.

Yes. Exactly. And they had some legitimate complaints with men. And I was a man.

How do you think that affected the kids in your classroom?

Initially, the same way as the women. Eventually it had a very positive aspect. Initially, it was one of two things, one they didn't want to have anything to do with me because I was a man. Or second of all they were very fearful of me. So those situations, that's the way many years started, especially with little girls. Young girls were oftentimes fearful of me. What's amazing is when I taught in a different situation here last year, it was not that way. I would walk up and down the hallway, it was just the opposite, and they embraced me. Now before the year was over, which's what happened. But initially there was quite a bit of fear.

How are the kids at this school different from those kids?

Well fifty one per cent of our kids are transfer. So they choose to be here. Which means you've got a parent making a conscious decision of where they want their child to go to school. So we know at least fifty one per cent of the parents are pretty involved. Just by the fact that they have made a choice about their education, as opposed to just whatever happens. That's not always saying they transferred for a great reason.

However that's one thing. Another is that our socioeconomic level is not the same. It's not an inner city school. It's a little country school where people want to get out of those situations bring kids here. There is no low income housing in our district. There's not much of a poverty rate. I think our free and reduced lunches are at 19%, which is pretty low. Most of those are reduced, not free. That's a pretty low percentage when you go from 80%. And a lot of parent involvement. We've got mostly two parent families as opposed to mostly one parent families, it just about opposite from the inner city. It was kind of amazing because that was the only kind of situation I had taught in. It was like night and day for me.

In what way?

Probably the first thing I noticed was that many of these students, and this gets back to the streetwise, were pretty naïve. When we were doing for the sixth graders, and I had taught third grade there, but the sixth graders here, they were amazed with some of the information they learned in the DARE program (drug prevention). When we took them to the county jail and they viewed some of the things, they were shocked and scared. They were plastered against the wall like this. (demonstrates) And we also took the magnet school students; the reason we took them was because of the situations they were in. We wanted to give them some positives, but there's a little bit of a fear that we need to put . . . to say, "Not only is this the right thing to do, but also because here are some consequences." We wanted them to see some consequences. They were never scared, seldom ever shocked, and every single time we went, two or three kids had relatives they were talking to. "Hey Uncle Bob", or whatever. And so it was more of a natural situation, more of a natural environment. These were third graders. My sixth graders were absolutely shocked and petrified. Up against the wall, emotionally drained when they left. Some of the kids cried. I'd never seen these kids cry before. My mentality was, "Hey I've been with third graders, surely sixth graders can handle it." I'd think, "Why are they crying?" It was because I'd been there seven times and I knew what it was, I was kind of reflecting back to my first time when the kids were not shocked and I was totally . . . shocked. Petrified of the whole situation. So streetwise, these kids were just really naive.

I just, when we had parent teacher conferences, I had 100% participation. Every parent came to conferences. My schedule was just packed. I was amazed by that. I had never had every parent come. As a matter of fact, I think about half was about as good as I ever got. And that was pulling teeth, dragging them in. One year we even did a raffle. We got a business to supply different things. Some things were just packages of Styrofoam cups, up to some nice things like a little end table. Stuff like that. It was just like "Come to the conference, get your name in the raffle, that's all it costs, then we'll do a drawing." That was our highest participation year, and still just barely over half. Even pulling teeth. These people, it was just a letter went home in their Friday folder, said, "Call the secretary, schedule a time." Secretary gave me a schedule, here they are. Kind of a natural thing. So parent participation was much higher. One little thing that shocked me was all the lunch boxes. They were bringing their own lunch. I had not seen that many lunch boxes before. I was used to seeing kids who didn't bring their lunch. There are days when there's something they don't like and so they have a choice. The menu

goes home, it means something. The menu going home before, just meant, "This is what I get to eat that day." The menu going home here means, "This is what I could eat here, or my mom could make me a lunch." It's just little things like that just really caught my eye.

Have you noticed a difference in the health of the kids?

I have noticed a difference in the cleanliness. Because, going back to the factor of these other kids may have been doing their own laundry, which probably meant they weren't doing it very often, or even if the parents were doing it, because of work situations, they didn't have time to do it. It seems like these kids come more prepared for school. Used to, what we did in our magnet program was we just had, we had a little case with toothbrush and comb for every student and toothpaste in the box. And sometimes half of them would go in and brush their teeth and comb their hair because it just didn't take place. Well we don't do that here. It became so natural with us "Here's your stuff, go down to the bathroom..." They just automatically came and started getting their things. It was just kind of part of the beginning of the day. Well it wasn't part of the beginning of the day here. Lice were much more prevalent there. It was just a constant. It was never really a time when we didn't have some kind of lice epidemic going on. I also noticed, and I don't know what it was, the kids always called it Scabies, there was always a high incidence of Scabies and to my knowledge, I don't think we've had any case of that here.

What I've found is that most people who haven't worked in inner city schools have never heard of it.

Right.

It's little burrowing mites that get in your skin and look like a rash. It's really contagious.

Another thing is kids don't beg for seconds. "Is there any of this left?" I tend to believe that our cooks there made a little extra, knowing those kids would still be hungry. I know the older kids, fifth and sixth graders, were able to get seconds. It seems odd to me now, as an administrator, that there were always leftovers. We don't have many left overs now. We find a number, we figure it out, a few extra, there's really nothing left, there's no one asking for more. Obviously, the puzzle piece that fits together there is you've got kids who know that's their meal today. Then you've got a group of kids who know they're going to eat dinner and they probably had breakfast. We have a lot of kids who eat here.

What do you think your teacher preparation in college did to prepare you to teach in inner city schools?

I don't want to school bash, but I would probably say none. It was a . . . college is not a culture teaching situation, necessarily. It was, "Here are some things students need

to know, here are some ways to teach them." We do that in every subject, and it was good, instructionally it was good. But when you're going into a classroom where that's not their greatest need that day, and you're still trying to cram it down their throat, well, I guess I wasn't taught to back up and say, "What is the greatest need today of this kid," and try to meet it so that I can move on to instructional matters. So that I would know to deal with cultural situations. So many times I had to look back and see, the student who was getting beat up, I had to look back and realize why his mom wanted me to let him walk home. See I didn't know that on my own. You can't teach every value system because they are as vast as there are people. But there are ideas within an inner city school.

When I first thought about this study, I thought, "Colleges of education teach people to teach, assuming that you can go anywhere and teach." What I found is that I was totally unprepared. I didn't know about scabies and such.

Is this the first district you taught in?

No I taught in Central City before I taught in this district.

Was it rougher there?

It was different. May be a little rougher. There almost none of the parents worked, where here, most parents had some sort of job, even if it was minimum wage. When you say they prepared you for what kids need to know, what do you mean?

I mean just subject matter. I learned all kinds of wonderful Language Arts, Science and Math, Reading ideas and how you can do these things differently. I learned nothing about going into different cultures, and I mean just different American cultures. I'm talking about just walking into a classroom in an inner city school, realizing that all of that did nothing for me as far as what I need to do first. I think what it did was it put a cap on. There are all these things I feel like you need to know when working with inner city students. See, I had to put on a totally different hat when I moved here. I was used to doing those things that I finally learned, well these kids, it was foreign to them and they are looking at me like I'm kind of crazy. Totally different situation. If I had some kind of idea of how to try to meet some needs first, then I could use all that wonderful information about subject matter. Subject matter, when you consider the full day of school, it's just a portion. I don't want to say a small portion, but if I haven't done everything I'm supposed to do beforehand, like meeting those needs, then it becomes a very small portion, and I'm cramming something down their throat that they could care less about.

So I was shocked. I mean I say I was shocked. I grew up in a poor home, so I did know about poverty, but it was in a small town, it was a situation, many people did know that my dad was an alcoholic. They did know our family couldn't get any extras that we wore our jeans longer than anybody else did and the holes would get really big. So I was used to people knowing things like that. But even in that setting, I did not go to an inner city school. I didn't have to survive like these kids do. I was on free and reduced lunch.

I did often get my only meal at school, but I didn't have to survive the gang situation. I didn't have to survive the street talk. All of that was kept... I was so oblivious to that. I lived out in the middle of nowhere, and it was still. Those kinds of things were shocking to me.

Lack of emotional safety?

Yes.

I think when we're talking about inner city schools, we aren't just talking about location and poverty, and we're talking about violence, race issues . . .

Right, exactly, that's probably mostly what I think we're talking about.

What do you think teacher preparation programs could do, if they could do anything to get teachers ready for inner city schools?

Continue what they are doing, but when you spend one class on classroom management, at the very end, and it's so speedy. I feel like classroom management should be taught different ways. Classroom management is not all discipline. Classroom management is, "How am I going to manage to deal with these students today?" I feel like there's a lot more that needs to be taught in that area. Because I don't feel like, when I'm managing my classroom, that I need to go in and make some assumptions, as far as assuming that he's eaten today. Assuming that he's slept at night. Assuming that his parents were at home at all last night. Assuming he was even home. That he wasn't involved in some type of drug activity. We came to our classrooms oftentimes with our classroom having what we consider a normal evening time and their parents made them go to bed at nine o'clock so they would be well rested for school. So we need to be taught first of all not to make those assumptions. And that under these situations here are some things we can do to deal with them, not just live with them. We deal with a lot but I think the university could help us learn to make a situation better. I also wouldn't know how to work in a really affluent situation. My current situation is pretty middle of the road, probably what universities have in mind when they prepare teachers, we're kind of taught toward a situation where everybody's kind of okay. What do you do when most of your students are below level because of these other factors? How are you going to teach? Are you going ahead to teach the third grade objectives? Are you going to meet individual needs? How? I think that's another thing, the university addresses how to meet classroom needs but doesn't focus on how to meet individual needs. Physical needs. Another area I think we need is teaching the different, the affluent community. These are the complications you will have. What about if the parents have doctoral degrees and know more than you do about many things. Are you going to use those resources? Last summer I went to view a school system to see what they do. It's one of the most affluent communities in the nation.

I think we have tremendous potential to make a difference. We have a lot of control over what happens in our classes. At the same time we have to have a lot of respect for where

they're coming from.

Right. I think one of those things, in brain research, I try to get teachers to understand that when a student feels backed into a corner, his brain just shuts down. When he's in survival mode, fighting out is the only solution he has. I think so often, especially teachers like me who don't know how to deal with that, we go in and throw them into the survival mode immediately. And then you've got a classroom full of kids in survival mode, and you're going to try to teach them about higher level thinking skills? It's not going to work. I know, I've tried it.

I've been there too. (Both laugh) I think you're exactly right. These kids come to school capable of handling very complex home and neighborhood situations, then at school they're made to feel stupid, because they can't figure what one answer I want them to put in the blank. If they can't they are Wrong.

That's right.

We ignore all the stuff they know. All the stuff they do well.

One thing we started doing after a year or two at the magnet school, we heard the idea from a workshop. It was really good for these kids. We made a board that said, "I'm a pro." It was something from the first of the year. This is something I do well. It might be making paper airplanes, taking care of younger kids, ironing clothes. We figured out most of those things were something they did at home. It was seldom ever something they did at school. And so it was a drawing factor from the resources at home. We'd put these things up and if we had a need for the service, we'll contact you as a person who can help out. Our eyes were opened to the fact that most of these were things they did at home. So we started creating situations where they could provide their expertise. I brought up ironing clothes because that's what one girl wrote. She did most of the ironing in her house. She did all of her clothes, so we brought up an ironing board and an iron. We had her teach the class. She was an expert at it, even though she may have hated it at home. We started drawing those things into the classroom. It was a connection of success for her. The other kids needed to learn because it was a life skill they needed to pick up. If not from this student, maybe from no one. That was something we felt we were able to add, to bring home to school.

Anything you want to add this time?

Probably just to reiterate that universities need to become more responsive to the needs of teachers. That they are not all instructional needs. There are many needs that teachers have. I couldn't give them all the answers, but if they could do a needs assessment of teachers, especially in inner city schools, "What would you say your greatest needs are?" I guarantee it would show us there are some places where we're going off track, where we're beating the dead dog over here and not really taking care of things we need to. That could be a training tool for the university to say, okay, here are some things we need to teach. These are some things we need to really tackle in the area

of teaching teachers.

My hope is that this project will open some doors, at least start a conversation. I certainly don't think I'm going to find all the answers, but I might get a few people thinking and talking about it. A lot of people think inner city education only happens in New York City and LA. or just the east coast. They think shootings, incarcerated parents, and violence don't happen in the Southwest.

They think we're just raising wheat.

(laugh) So hopefully this will start a conversation.

Good. I'll see you next time.

Thank you.

TOM
Written Protocol
Written Between Interviews One and Two

Wayne came to my third grade class, and he seemed so angry. He could not be pressured. He just couldn't handle it. If he were pressured into completing or performing any task, he would get raging mad. He would throw his desk, chair, or any object in class. I had to allow him to roam around the room to get any portion of an assignment. He often made the other students very nervous.

Wayne defecated in his pants at least four days out of the week, but when I would ask him about it in private, he would deny the behavior. When I contacted his parents to let them know he needed clean clothes, they would also deny that there was a problem.

He didn't have any friends. Every time one of the other students tried to befriend him, he would become belligerent and turn them away. He was a loner and seemed to enjoy being as such.

Wayne's favorite thing to do was to play with cars and trucks in the dirt. He seemed so animated during play, as well as other times. I often wondered what was going through his mind. Did he see me as an ally or an enemy? Was he able to befriend anyone; adult or child?

I cared for him as much as I have cared for any student, probably more. I wanted so much to meet his needs and offer him any assistance that I could. I felt so inadequate, because he was so alone, friendless, angry.

TOM
Interview #2
December 2, 1998

We talked a little last time about kids on medication. What is it like to teach kids who are taking medication?

Probably the most experience I have with kids on medicine is with Ritalin. I think that was because when we worked in the program that we worked in, there was always just a high number of students who either were on Ritalin or whose parents thought they needed Ritalin, or a teacher previously had said they need to be on Ritalin, or something. I've had as many as seven or eight.

Out of how many children?

Twenty, eighteen to twenty. I wouldn't say they always all need it, but you know that's kind of a personal opinion, but anyway, I've had a lot of experience with that. I tend to believe we teachers often times will... We don't know how to handle a situation. We haven't had the experience of teaching to know how to deal with students who are hyperactive; things like that, kind of wild. And when I say kind of wild, just doing things that maybe a lot of typical boys and girls would do. So we don't know how to deal with it sometimes so we'll say, "Well, they need medicine" or something. So I think we put a lot of kids on medicine that don't really need it. But there are some that really need the medicine. I can think of one student who was, he was a very sweet boy. He was from a family of poverty, but the parents were, they were good parents, they really wanted to work with him, work with the school... But, when he did not have his medicine, he was... he had a different look in his eye, he was totally out of control, he would harm other students, even his friends, his closest friends, he didn't even like his behavior when he was, not on his medicine, so that was probably my first experience of seeing a student that really, really needed that medication. That was good for him.

How does that work in the school day to day? Do teachers dispense medication to children?

Typically they would have taken that medicine before they left home, that morning. Then, at lunchtime they, will have more medicine typically, I think, most of the kids I've ever known have been on...anywhere between 5 and 15 milligrams. What that means, I don't know, I just know, you know, how many they take, whether... It's almost always between 5 and 15 milligrams and they usually take some in the morning some at noon and some in the evening time, also.

So did that have effect during the day?

Yes as a matter of fact, it did. Typically around, let's say lunch was at noon, around eleven, eleven fifteen, you'd notice a behavior change. And when I talk about this I'm talking about the kids who are ADD and who do need to be on Ritalin, and I did have some like that, inevitably, every year, at least two or three, who are very deserving

of...really needed it. And by eleven o'clock, it was just almost a lost hour until lunchtime. So what we would do, something I would try to do was, I had a doctor who said, if you could just allow them to exert part of that energy, then their brain can function better, they can come back to a little more of what we would consider normal in the classroom. And, so like when we were at Washington, I had that door that was outside my classroom, so I could say, run to the fence and back three times, and the student I had would run to the fence and back about three times, then he would come back in and he could focus a whole lot better, and sometimes the exertion of energy would help a whole lot.

And that's something just the one kid would do and not the whole class?

Yeah. It was done, and at first, you know, the other students were kind of jealous and stuff. But, as they went through the year, they recognized his need. And we even talked about it some. With his permission, I would ask, "Do you see how sometimes he'll tend to get in more trouble, things like that if we don't allow this, and we've got to work with his need". As a matter of fact, that's why, when they were starting the older alternative program, they were getting some stationary bicycles and things like that to put in the classrooms to allow students to just go spend five minutes on the stationary bike then to have a refocus. I think that it's really good for them. So I tried to learn, with my students like that, whenever they were on those down times, we would try to allow them to exert some energy.

Did you ever feel torn between trying to be fair to everybody, and trying to meet individual kids needs?

A lot of times. Because there are some kids, what he saw, and I'm thinking of that particular student that I had run back and forth to the fence, what he saw as a little grueling, the other kids saw as just a whole heck of a lot of fun. You know, gosh he gets to leave class for a minute and run to the fence! And actually, he thought it was great the first couple of times, but afterwards it was like, "uh, I gotta do that." And I did have the permission of his parents to do that, too. But, it was really at a distance I could see him from my window. So there was a problem with that initially. I say there was a problem, it was just a situation that we always had to deal with, but you know, we made our class a community, and when we talked about differences, we talked about needs and things like that. I think it kind of helped because it allowed the other students to come to me with their needs, also. "Well he needs this, and here's a need that I have". So I think it kind of opened the class up to helping meet their needs even more so. And it did mean a whole lot more work on the teacher. I had to be willing to do that.

What were some of the other needs?

(Exhale) Well, I can remember some instances, this kind of takes us into a different topic, a different type of medication, I can think of students who, if they were on asthma medicine, because of their asthma, typically those medicines contain steroids, which create a large amount of aggression. They tend to do things that they would never do

otherwise. I have a boy, as a matter of fact, right now, he's in one of our classes here, that every time his allergies react, he has to, and his allergies are bad, they're really bad, he has to go onto asthma medicine, which has the steroid, which causes his behavior... I mean he will do things just totally unheard of, that he would never do otherwise and his parents find it to be just very bizarre behavior that doesn't happen when... And we've even tracked his behavior. With his teacher, they send home a yellow, red, or green everyday, And so the parent and his teacher have begun tracking so when they look with a calendar, they see high allergy season, he's getting yellow and red all the time. Low allergy seasons, it's just green, continual. And so, what we're trying to do, and something I've done with kids with allergies before, um, some of those needs are just trying to allow them to exert their aggressions, as well, in a different manner. One thing that I would try, one of the students would go down to the counselor's office and she had one of those punching bags that hang? And she would just really let them get aggressive with that punching bag. It would take 10 or 15 minutes to be out of the classroom, but that 10-15 minutes was worth it when they came back, and they weren't so aggressive with the other students.

And I had a little boy who was, he was just tearful, when his mom said she would have to put him on his medicine again, he would cry. He would hate it. Because he knew his behavior changed, he was aware of it, aware enough to realize that when he came off of the medicine that he didn't like it at all. But it wasn't anything he could help, because his allergies were so severe.

It's important to breathe.

Yeah, so it was really beneficial to have something like that. I guess one thing that I just found out was that for most kids, if they're allowed to exert their energy, express their anger, or their aggression, more so, in one fashion, then they won't do it with the students in the classroom or the teacher.

I just read last night, that between 1982 and 1995, the cases of asthma doubled. They said they're not really sure why.

Well one thing that I had read, by a Canadian researcher, who was feeling like a lot of people before had asthma, they just didn't know it. Because of things like smoking being really popular, a lot of it was blamed on smoking that, of course makes it even worse, but they didn't see the other effects, that there was actually asthma there to begin with, that weren't being treated. They're blaming it on some crib deaths, things like that. That they were assuming, may have had the fact that the kid couldn't breath, but they were not developed enough, their own body wasn't developed enough to be able to really dig deep for a breath of fresh air, so it would just shut off. So these are just theories, I don't think he's really proven a lot on that, but I think they're really feeling like there have always been a lot of people with asthma that have just kind of have been blamed on something else.

Well, while we're sort of on the subject, let's talk about stress and kids.

Hmm, especially in, I feel like the kids that are in the lower socio-economic group, have stresses just beyond our comprehension sometimes. This is something we talked about before, I think, was a fact that they, when school is out, their responsibilities become so great. You know, whether it's being the mommy or daddy to younger siblings, or just being alone, knowing the parents aren't going to be there to take care of them, so you know, a lot of the latch key situations. And living in neighborhoods that are scary, so they're stressed about, you know, crime in their area and, "Is something going to happen to me?" Seeing a lot of relatives go to jail or bad things happening to them, I think they stress over that a lot. I think, a lot of times parents, obviously, they express their stresses about not being able to pay bills and things like that. And the kids take those things on, the responsibility of washing their own clothes, not to say responsibility is a bad thing, but when it's piled on...and not given out as needed, as they begin to grow, I think the stresses overwhelm them.

I was just looking at a third grader's story, This third grader was writing about getting a job and getting money for food. Especially in a lot of families that are single parent families, mom is doing her darndest to provide as well as she can. Some cases it's dad who's the single parent, a matter of fact we've got that kind of situation right here (current school) in one family, but, (sigh) typically mom is just really working hard to try to make ends meet, and maybe the alimony's not coming, and the child support's not coming, and even in those cases it's still tough, it's still tough to make it and the kids see that, they recognize it. They know the need is there, and those stresses become a family stress, it's not just an adult stress. Even in the situations, I think where parents are trying to keep those things from their kids. Things, you know, when they ask, "Can we do this or that?" "Well, we just can't afford that, I'd like to, you know", which brings on new stresses of, "I can't be like the other kids." You know. I think on the other end of the spectrum, you know the kids who really have a lot, have a lot of stresses, also. Many of those situations, they have a lot of things, but they don't have a lot of interaction with people, not a lot of relationship and time, and so I think that there's...

I don't think that stress is just for lower socio-economic, although that's what I've dealt with the most, I think because I came from that, first of all, and secondly, because I've dealt with that mostly, whenever I was working in the At Risk program. So I saw those, and I think stress, I think kids, I do believe kids are going to school with more stress than they did when I was a kid, however, I think back to kids who were children of the depression, and I see the stresses they also went through, and I think there's a lot of comparison. We're not going through a depression, but we are going through an emotional depression, of sorts. You know, many times with our kids, so I think there's a lot of equal stresses.

A lot of people who lived through the depression talk about it their entire life.

Yes,

To the point of saving tea bags in foil to be reused again later after they make a cup of tea. I'm wondering if we give kids permission to talk about their stress. Or if we just want them to be happy and not worry, so we don't really let them...

I don't think we give them as many opportunities as they really need. I mean, we say that we offer counseling at school, but how much of that is just us talking to them about what they should and shouldn't do? You know that kind of thing. The group, the wonderful group counseling that offers all these wonderful ideas and options for them to do...but it still isn't counseling.

Just say no?

Right, It's still not counseling, "Yeah, they're sayin' this..." It's just another teaching environment. It's not really allowing open expression and sometimes I think teachers are scared of finding out too much, because, "If I find out too much, I've got to do something about it". I don't think we do it on purpose. Sometimes the more we find out, the more we have to get involved, the more we need to do something, the more we don't know what to do, and so it's a difficult situation to be in. And sometimes we don't allow it. I can think of times when kids have tried to say things to teachers and I'd probably be included and we've kind of nipped it, because, we didn't know where to go with it, and instead of allowing the expression, you know we've cut them off. And so all the kid reads into that is, either "They don't care," or "They can't solve my problem." Things like that.

They get a message that that's not the thing to do.

Right, "We don't do that at school, you know, we learn math and reading here."

How does that affect math and reading at school for kids, the violence or stress? How does that affect the classroom?

Based upon what I've looked at in brain research, that the first thing that your brain is going to do, based upon what I have read, is survive. Survival is first. Those basic needs are first. Then, beyond that, then we can begin adding to our brain capacity. You know we can learn how to add, and we can learn how to, multiply wonderful fractions, and all those great things. We can learn what letters say, and all that type of thing. But, when you go back to the first thing being the survival and the instincts. Well, if they don't feel like they're surviving then they're in the survival mode. Their brain is in the simplest form that it can do and that it will do that it will always revert back to. Survival. And if they haven't been taken to a level beyond survival, feeling like that's all they're doing, then it's not only that they're not learning, it's that they can't learn. It's physically impossible.

What's that like when you're a teacher in the classroom?

It's very frustrating because it always goes back to that... "He's so capable you know, he has so much potential, but he or she's not doing...this". They're not meeting the standard; they're not meeting the excellence. And we do strive for excellence, but also, in the midst of that we forget the feelings, we leave out the emotions, we forget that they are living on survival and that their brains just can't do that.

I think sometimes that teachers also add to and make the stress worse because they take it personally. "This kid won't work for *me*."

For me, right, that is exactly right. And not only do we consider that, we tell them that. They get that whether we've actually verbalized it, or whether we have shown them in all of our actions. Typically what we do, teachers put them on their "bad kid" list. You know, people say there's not really a bad kid list, well there is a bad kid list, you know and teachers will kind of place them there in their mind. You know, the expectation changes. And I don't think the expectation is to change, for the student, I still want them to succeed and I still want them to meet a high standard. And I think that's the expectation we have to maintain. But what we have to do is somehow into that survival and make them feel safe, make them feel secure. And yes, we cannot change a lot at home, many times, but we can change the school environment and we can take them beyond survival for the time that you're right here.

Sometimes that may mean not requiring so much when they leave. If a kid realizes, now I'm kind of sold on this, I have no proof to back me up except for some experiences that I've had, and that is that if this student knows that, and I don't think this is right for every student, but for those survival students if this student knows that when he gets here at eight and when he leaves here at three, I'm gonna expect him to do these certain things, and I'll work with his needs, and all that kind of thing, but when three o'clock comes I'm not going to expect anything else. Sometimes they can draw themselves out of that, realize this is a safe enough environment, "I'm here, I can do this," and it doesn't mean they're not thinking about other things, not worried, not stressed out, but I can work on this because I know at three o'clock it's over. I think what a lot of kids are seeing is that I've done this all day, then at three o'clock they're being sent all this other stuff, because they didn't do what they were supposed to during the day, you know, they were daydreaming, all that kind of thing. And that's gonna happen, but what I have felt like has happened, is that at three o'clock and I shut it down anyway, no matter what has happened, then the time began to be spent more wisely because they didn't have to worry about it along with everything else that night. There are kids who just really don't have a lot of stress in their life, and just need some extra help, and homework, and that kind of thing is great, but not for a survival student. They need to know that there's a time when this quits.

Especially if they have to go home and cook supper and take care of babies…

Yes. They have so much to do. They have homework. It's actual home work, and they need a stop time. To know it's over. And when they can see a light at the end of the tunnel, I think that sometimes they can come out of survival. That's only, that's a very small part of it. But I think that's certainly a beginning of how I can change, to assist them in their needs.

Something that I found, I used to get so depressed and think, "I'm never going make a difference for these kids, and they are in this neighborhood, along with their parents and their grand parents, it's just a cycle. And then I realized it doesn't matter what

difference I make in twenty years. What I can make is a difference now in this six or seven and a half hours each day.

Right.

I can make sure they're safe, no one is hurting them, and they're not seeing anyone get hurt. For me that was a survival thing, because I was completely overwhelmed. Thinking there's no point, I struggle to teach these kids things that have nothing to do with their lives. They're struggling to survive. It was just really frustrating.

Especially when it may be a student who has just rented a house there for a month, because rent was due somewhere else, and they just kind of do the hop around town, you know because it was less expensive that way. You may think, I've got a month with this child. What change am I gonna make? What environment am I gonna create for them in the next thirty days? Is it going to be worthwhile? And I think that one thing I tried to make myself realize is that, "Yes I want to make it worthwhile. No matter how long they are here, I want it to be worthwhile. I want them to be safe in my classroom. I want them to know there's not going to be yelling and screaming in my classroom. If they get into a squabble with another student, it's not a knock down drag out like it may be at home. It may be winner takes all at home." That's another thing we forget. "Well, but you were punching him, you know that's wrong..." Yes, that is wrong, but how far have I gone to teach him that, you know talk about aggression, and to let him express his aggression, and why he's angry and why he does this. When if he doesn't fight for it at home, he doesn't get it, period. There's just a totally different environment at home than there is at school. And to even stop and think before you react...

It's a learned skill.

And many times home is all instinct. "I better do it and I better do it now. I can't wait around to think through this"... And we want them to turn off home life and this is school, this is school life... then you can turn it back off today, later on, but right now, let's just change lives completely. You're someone else.

That used be a real struggle on the playground because they would scuffle and fight, and the first school I taught at had a strict policy, "If you fight, you go home. It doesn't matter who started it; it doesn't matter who settles it. Any one who hits or kicks or whatever goes home." And I would have parents say, "I don't want my kid to be a sissy, I've told him to fight back. Somebody bothers them, they're to hit 'em."

Right.

So I would be teaching four and five year olds, "These can be the rules for home and your neighborhood. These have to be the rules at school."

Right.

And that takes a lot of sophistication for a little person who has only been alive about sixty months to make those distinctions.

Exactly. It's almost like, "When I'm around them, I've gotta be like this and when I'm around these people..." I think kids are pretty flexible, as far as those things are concerned. A lot of it they do naturally because they read us so well. We don't think they do. They read adults really well. And I think some of it comes naturally, and, but, the sad thing is, we're just teaching them to behave how this particular environment wants me to behave. In the meanwhile, we are also saying, don't be like someone else. Don't just do what someone else does just because that's what they want you to do. I mean if they jumped off a cliff would you? "Well, is that what that environment expects of me? I guess I would." You know? They begin to read us, to read our actions. And I'm not saying that, I do believe that we do have to take a stand against violence in school, fighting, and things like that. I'm not sure our approach is the proper approach.

"Because I said."

Right. You know, I want them to understand that you know somewhere in life, maybe it's not at home, that somewhere in life, you will be able to reason with people. People generally are reasonable. Maybe it's not that way at home. Maybe it's not that way, and without bashing home, without saying your parents are really awful people, somewhere, people really are reasonable. And then they should experience those reasonable people. And the funny thing is, we jump on that so much that the kids see us as just the same. We're just as unreasonable as everyone else is. So they're having to fight their way out of that situation, too. So we really haven't proven anything different. So all we're doing is doing the same things, same thing, same thing, but expecting different results. And I had a man tell me one time, when you do the same thing over and over and expect different results, that's the definition of insanity. You know, why would we expect something different, when we haven't changed what we are doing. We haven't changed, really changed the environment. We've changed the environment, sort of. But, we're doing the same actions.

Still authoritarian.

Right. We're doing the same actions. "Do as I say, not as I do, and do it because I said to." And there's not any example, (Sigh), over and over we talk about modeling and example and all that. We talk about it a lot. You know, but the bottom line is, until they experience someone who says, "You know I realize that this situation happened. I forgive you." "I really don't want you to do it again. It hurt my feelings. This is why it hurt my feelings. And I don't want to retaliate toward you, because I still care for you." As they begin seeing those things, and it can't just happen one time, it's got to happen a thousand times, then they come to the realization, yeah, this is a real situation. There are reasonable people. There are people who are not going to hit me back when I hit them. There are people who are not going to smack me because I said something that they didn't like. It goes back to what we were talking about last time, that we didn't learn

about that in college, either. We didn't learn how to show them a lot of things. You know? And I can write a beautiful lesson plan, but I really don't know that I can...

Teach respect?

Right.

What about kids who make it anyway? Kids who become resilient.

I'd like to think that's me. I'd really like to think that. In my family, I have three older brothers, and my parents, and it was like that at home, it was a fight. If you wanted something, you fought for it. If you didn't win, you didn't get it. Whether that was dinner, or your way, in any form or fashion you fought for it. And I like to think that there are all different kinds of ways students go about doing that. I think that one thing is, is that, they see someone. Like in my particular situation, in one particular year, two people made a great impact on me. One of them was a teacher. One was a principal. One, the principal said, "You and your brothers are all going to be losers just like your parents." And I quote.

Very nice

It was really nice. It was my principal, you know? And I was a kid who made decent grades. As a matter of fact I made really good grades. And I did choose to try to forget about that. I could turn that off, because it was just a, I was away from there, so in my mind, I'd just shut that off. That was my survival, just to shut it off. But, you know, that statement just really shocked me. However, the very same year, my teacher showed me what a reasonable person does. She was very compassionate when I did things that were just totally uncalled for and off the wall. She didn't accept it as acceptable behavior, but she didn't just lash me. She explained why it was unacceptable, who else I would hurt in the process. She would tell me, "I'm not going to behave that way toward you because I don't think it's right." She just, compassion just really overflowed in her. So those examples both really helped me. It's sad to say that my principal's really helped me, but I thought, "I'm gonna be like her! I'm gonna be nothing like that!" It was just, and it was a mindset. I said my mind was I don't want to be like him and I certainly am not going to be a loser like he says I'm going to be. Because I didn't want to meet his expectations. I wanted to meet Mrs. Hubbard's expectations, because that was, maybe, that's just what I wanted to be.

I've seen kids just like that. I could name... I can think of one who, he's in high school now. He's not out of school yet, but, he is from the "hood." He still lives there, he doesn't have a dad. He's never met his dad. As a matter of fact, I'm not sure if his mom knew who his dad was. His mom worked as a barmaid. As far as I know she still does. And he was just kind of raised in an awful situation. Very aggressive, when he was younger, but someone, somewhere along the way, taught him something different, because he comes to me all the time and shows me, "These are the grades I'm getting, I haven't been in trouble." He said, Its been three or four years since he's been sent to SAC.

What is SAC?

Student Adjustment Center which is where once they get in trouble so much at their school then they get sent over to the student adjustment center. And basically there's just a little cubbyhole.
To get adjusted?

They have to do all their work

Is it like in-house suspension?

Right, only it's in a totally different building. It's actually a stage past in-house suspension, because in-house suspension is in the building, this is in a totally different building.

Oh

He hasn't been there in three or four years. Has been on the honor roll, several semesters in a row. He has really cleaned up his act, you know. He has just decided to be a survivor. And I mean he has talked to me about going to college. As a matter of fact he asked me how he can apply for grants, and things like that. As a matter of fact, we went and got some grant information. I told him where to go at Carver (local regional university) to get information. He brought them by; we talked about "This is how you fill it out. This is the information you get from your mom." And stuff like that and so he's done that and he's really, he's going to make it. He's going to be a survivor. I know he's going to do well. But had a person looked at him several years ago, they would have said, No Way! I mean he's just going to be another statistic. And fortunately, I think he is going to be a statistic. It's just going to be really good.

What do you think teachers can do? To affect that kind of resiliency.

I think teachers can do a lot of things. And they're probably very generic things that we talk about all the time, but I don't know that they're being done. That is one, just be very compassionate to their survival. And two, to really show them how to be a survivor. Whether you come from a bad experience or not. Just show them how to treat other people. How to be that reasonable person. How not to be "I'm going to physically defend myself to the end. And I'm going to lash out at other people." To show them how not to be that way. To actually, and in the process, that means you're going to have to portray those actions and attitudes toward them, whenever they wrong us as teachers. And that's one thing as teachers. If they wrong each other, we can talk them through it. Where if they wrong us, we want to crucify them. When, gosh, all they did was... And yes, you're an adult, and there's a respect issue. I understand, and I do believe that students need to respect adults. But who's going to teach them how to respect adults, and who's gonna teach them how to respect each other? You know if we just expect them to be born and to know that, then we have wronged them already. And if they're not being

respectful, and we just say, "well you need to be respectful," instead of actually teaching them how to be respectful. These are the things, and not only tell them what they need to say, but to say them to them, when they are being good. Kind of catch them being good, kinds of things. If we haven't done that, we've wronged them. And I even go so far as to say that it's not only a question of can we help them, but if we don't then we have hurt them.

One of the things I was just thinking about was a four year old in my class who said to someone else, "That's not appropriate"(appropriate behavior). I thought, "What does that mean to a four year old?" So I learned by listening to kids to listen to myself. What meaning do my words have for the children?

Exactly.

I think we can learn a lot just by listening.

I ask kids a week or two after a situation. Especially now as a principal, it's even easier to do this, "Why did you get in trouble?" "What happened back then?" And the times they literally say, "I don't know." That scares the daylights out of me because I think they went through the experience, whatever punishment was involved, and they stand before me, and really say, I don't know, which means the punishment was inappropriate. It may have been an appropriate punishment, but it was obviously brought about in an improper way somehow, by the teacher or something else because there was no learning involved. And there's no purpose for punishment if there's no learning. That's what discipline is all about. Learning process. You don't do something that harms someone just to be harming them. It's to bring about a measurable amount of pain. Whether it is doing without something or, you know, not going on a field trip or whatever happened. That measurable amount of pain was for a purpose. It was for a learning purpose. And if I can come back to them in a month and they've, they're like," I don't know," and they've got that look on their face like I really don't know. Then something went awry and it just didn't work out. We've got to back up and get some kind of understanding.

That makes me think about the kids who go to "time out". Why is it always the same kids? Why is it always the same kids who get their card changed?

Right.

You know, if what we're doing is working, why are we having to do it over?

It's the not changing what we're doing. It's the insanity issue.

Anything else you can think of? That the world needs to hear?

The world needs to hear... The world needs to hear we really need to have really good teachers get into the profession who really really, really not only want to teach kids

because they love learning and they love teaching them information, but we also need some teachers who want to show some compassion for kids. And I don't mean compassion to be a detriment, because there can be a point where compassion can be that you're letting them get away with things that you really need to teach them not to do. Someone that is compassionate to the point of really wanting to help change the situation. Change some behaviors, some actions. I love it when kids come tell me they're on the honor roll and they're doing all these wonderful things. It makes me feel like sometime maybe I made a small change.

Thank you very much.

APPENDIX D
Merissa's Interviews and Written Protocol

MERISSA
Interview #1
December 21, 1998

What I want to talk to you about is teaching in an inner city school.

Ok

Tell me about some of the kids you've taught over the years in the classes.

The most inner city kids would be at Tallis Elementary, where we had third generation raising the kids because moms and dads weren't there. It was the grand parents and the grand parents were illiterate, too. So most of the teaching took place at school. They can't even get help with homework, they didn't even understand the processes we used, the terminology, so it was all held at school and they started instrumenting tutoring programs after school. Those kids were the most devastating so far that I've worked with. Here at Sycamore (Elementary), we don't have as many, we don't see as much of that. I see more foster care, I have seen here more foster care than anything but then those parents are educable, they can help the kids and they work with them more than at Tallis. What other things, characteristics you want to know about them, or what you are looking for.

Yes, what I am thinking about is a lot of people don't think that there are inner city schools in Oklahoma...

Ha, what a joke.

I think universities prepare students to teach middle class.

That's right.

And you get out there like I did, and you don't know what you're doing.

That's true because in the university you assume that everyone comes to school knowing their name, their address, their birth date, knowing the letters of the alphabet, they can all count from one to twenty, they can recognize numbers and letters, you assume they can hold a pencil, you assume they have colored and coloring books, or some form of paper; it doesn't happen. A lot of them come to school with nothing. It's like buying a used car, you don't know what you are getting until you start driving it, well that's what happened in kindergarten when I taught kindergarten. The kids would come in and for 5 years they had just stayed at home, if there was a TV, they watched it, or they just played. They had no idea of their surroundings. When you say draw a complete picture, which means sky, ground, what's going on in the picture, when you say draw a

person, their awareness wasn't there because they weren't educated to be aware of things around them. So consequently they didn't know eyes, nose, mouth; they knew they had them but to label them, it wasn't there. So you have to start teaching all the way back, almost 18 months - 2 years old in a quote, "middle class home", where when your child begins to babble you're saying this is a sound, and you have a ball, this is round, you tell them the color, it will bounce, we can catch it. Some of those kids had no idea, they couldn't even label their own clothing when you are telling them to "pull your pants up, where's your undergarments, zip, button, snap". They could do a lot of things but the language skills, the language skills are missing in a lot of inner city kids, and that's because they don't talk, they don't have to, they just point or because of such a busy life, mom does everything so she doesn't take time to say "pick up your fork", "get your spoon", she just says "eat". And where we take for granted somebody has told this child you're eating chicken, he knows you're eating a hamburger, use a fork and a spoon, when you get them in a cafeteria, they know how to use utensils but they are not sure what it is, I'm talking mainly the kindergarten-first graders that you see coming in, and then they wind up in preschool or in prefirst, or they wind up in Special Ed, not because they are retarded, and I call it culturally deprived. Its a term I use with a lot of kids because they have the academic ability but they don't have any culture to go with it so they come to school delayed. And after being in special services for a year or so with a good Special Ed teacher, they're out. They just needed that, or if you get them in a transition class with a good teacher, a good teacher, one that's aware of their disability, which is the lack of knowing how to use crayons properly, holding a pencil properly, how to cut properly, all those things we take for granted, they don't have. And those are skills that don't qualify for physical or occupational therapy because they can't cut. They have the motor skills but they haven't had the training of them. Those are the kinds of things that disturb me the most. Because when you are delayed two years in every area you're going to be behind most of your life and you'll play catch-up and inner city kids play catch up most of their school life. If you remove them from the setting, that's fine, but you have to understand they're still delayed. And you'll put them right in a regular classroom and you'll give them F's because they can't do the work. I mean they started out two years behind everybody else, when everybody else is reading, they're learning ABC's and sounds. So its just a soap box ...

<u>It's good.</u>

...I can just stay on it because I think as educators we need to look at their program that's why I want to, if not institute, work with a program that starts at birth and trains the mother how to be an educating parent because we have too many young mothers that weren't educated themselves that are mothering children. We have a cycle we need to break. It will cost us less to break it early and the statistic has told us, than to break it later when they are in prison. And those kids will go to jail because they've gotta do something to be seen, and the majority of them that's their problem. Or, they are so mentally delayed they don't know how to do anything to achieve the stuff that they want, they want a new car, they want new clothes but they're going to go steal them if they can't get them by any other financial way. Who's going to give them a job when they steal rather than go to high school, and they are not sure how to put a sentence together, and

not sure how to use a computer because the only time they get to use it is at a 30 minute lab at school. So they are sitting there lost. I think they need to institute Vo-Tech at 6th grade so we can get some of these kids trained on skill jobs because a lot of the CEO companies are not going to be there for them. I mean, look at Boeing laying off, well, if they're not going to hire them, they need to have some kind of trade of their own that they can give back to society. And the best place to start them is 6th grade. Let them go to Vo-Tech for two hours a day and come back and work on academics. I've seen a lot of kids in junior high that I know will not see 9th grade. Its because of interest, they have no interest in what we are doing. We test them to death and the test doesn't show us anything we don't already know. If again you are in a good building where the educators are really stressing their academic skills, now I'll grant that there are some educators that don't do that and they just slide them through, but if you get a building that they're doing that and you see this child really needs a skill more than any of the academics, we need to do that, we need to service them in both areas and that depends on the makeup of your school district. You know you've got all these inner city kids and academics is going to be way down. We need to cater to how they learn, that's another one of my little pet peeves is we want teach them all the same way, nope. They are going to have learning differences, modalities, and we need to deal with it. When you find them that way you need to have that teacher trained to learn to teach that sight person, to learn to teach that kinesthetic person, so they can be all that they can be. It's not happening, its not working, and we are loosing our kids. Then they are breeding more children like them for lack of education. They just don't know. So if we could start a program, and I don't know how you can make it mandatory, that these parents will come and bring their children so we can teach the kids and the parents at the same time, then bring them both together so that the parent will know what we expect when they go home with their child, so they can get used to saying "Put on your sock" and now just "Here, let's get ready to go", you know, "hurry up hurry up", so they can help them tie a shoe, as we know, all that works together in making a kid aware.

I saw a poster the other day. It can take the average four year old 16 minutes to put on a sock.

(laugh) I like that.

I thought you might.

I like that, and that is so true, it's like with Mrs. Genny, she does a wonderful job, I could just use her room as a lab forever, and she utilizes such everyday things, home aid, everyday things, so you don't have to go and buy the most expensive toy to teach this child, no, it's just stuff around the house. And what I hate is they took away their Fridays (Pre-Kindergarten in this district used to be four days a week, and teachers visited children's homes and held educational meetings for parents on Fridays, now Pre-K meets five days a week). They had home visit day on Fridays. Well, of course, funds got cut and they couldn't go in. That's what they were doing, going into the home helping the parent teach the child. And, especially since we have more bilingual students here, and I should say just lingual, because they come in with only Spanish or only Vietnamese, and

then they want us to turn them around to English. Well, how am I going to do that when they are sitting in a class of over 20 kids and the bilingual assistant is only there for 30 minutes? There has to be another program, there has to be another way.

How do you feel your college preparation prepared you to teach in an inner city classroom?

I don't think it helped me. It really did nothing. My Special Education helped me more than my masters in early childhood. Because in special education they geared you to the lower child. You knew the levels that might come in, but in early childhood we did not deal a lot with inner city. If I had not taught and didn't realize they were already there to ask pertinent questions about, "Now how do I gear this down with my kids", if you had gone straight through it wouldn't have helped very much. I think sometimes we are too far removed and because of the work that they have to cover about the regular classroom when you are in the College of Ed. they miss, they miss that whole culture of children and I do believe we are going to have to start recognizing the other cultures that are coming up. Because I know we started recognizing the blended family culture then we started recognizing the mixed children, now they need to recognize the ones that are non-English speaking children. How to teach that child when you walk out with your degree, you are so excited and you sit there with three kids that don't speak English, have not seen English, and they're in your First Grade classroom. They need to be trained to deal with that. I think this district has instituted a summer program that lasts for two weeks and teachers are trained in the different cultures. Because you are insulting kids sometimes when you don't know their culture. So again, they bring in other students for a week, that you know, a student that would benefit from this program that would go back to your school to help with this program of language barriers and culture barriers, then bring them in for a week. Its an excellent program.

So then, it's the elementary kids that are helping teachers?

And the other students in the classroom, by learning the other kids culture. We have a lot of Vietnamese and Hispanics. We have a lot of Caucasian kids that don't have a clue what their holidays are, what this tradition means to them, why they don't do what we do, you know, the way we handle things. If you bring them in and make them aware of that culture then it's a lot easier for peers to say "Oh, you know why they're doing that, let me tell you...". You know, you go onto the playground "Well, let me tell you why they're doing it this way", as opposed to the teacher spending all the time. So, they're bringing in both populations, the teacher, and the child during the summer and they're paying for it. It's not out of the teachers' pocket again, it's something that the district is doing and, we've now, West Elementary came in this last summer, because its just this district, and I think as it grows, we'll get more people in. Because, it's a fact that they're a very mobile society and these move from district to district and we need some continuity among ourselves to help them out. So I'm thinking that is one way to do that, and also with our accreditation program. When we mingle together as teachers to decide what do we need in our buildings to make this school work in a self improvement study, we are now listing things like cultural activities, that will help us become more aware and to help

us help our kids. But at the college level, I'm not sure what the holdup is, I'm not sure if its the regents saying we need to have x number of hours in this and this and this. But I think it would be profitable to have seminars, if it's nothing but a weekend seminar, like they do multicultural seminars which I think need to go more in depth,

um hmm,

Because that surface communication we're getting did not help me one bit. (laugh) When I got back out into the real world.

How do you think it could help, what do you think they could do?

I think they could have at least once, if you have a 3 day class I think once a week they need to have someone in from that culture talking to you about that culture "how we learn", which way is best for us. Knowing that Indians look down, they're not being smart, they're not ignoring you, this is just the way, that mannerism. That we have to help, I guess you wanna say, Americanize the Western World, to teach them, and you know to bring in even people that are in the field that have dealt with children that are not bilingual, "What'd you do?", when you walk in that room, "What did you do with that child?" You know, people like Mrs. Genny do deal with them on that level. To bring them in once a week, or in a night class, have somebody come in part of the time, first hand, and then even have them come out and do a practicum in a classroom setting like that. To see the frustration of the teacher as well as the student when you can't teach me, then that is what I see a lot happening sometimes. The teachers are as frustrated as the kids because "I can't reach that person"

You were talking about your special Ed did help, what part of it helped?

Yes, the training I received in Special Education was um, you work with Special Ed, you have a class and you bring in your child, teaches how the brain works, teaches you how you learn, I didn't get that in regular ed. And then you have an opportunity to go and work with children with limited abilities, well, when one comes in a regular classroom, that doesn't have all of the abilities, that helps you relate, "This area must have the problem" or "This area of the child's life" and you know what you realize is that they have a good brain, it has just never been developed. We often talk about, we went into depth on developmental stages, and when I went through early childhood, that helped quite a bit. That helped with the developmental stages while Special Ed helps you, "What do you do if you don't have them", you know, it went a step further. Because like in my physically handicapped class, when they didn't have those developmental stages, and you have to start right there with them, and you know how that brain's working, you know what level they're gonna be working on, you know what kind of academics to expect or not to expect. And that's where that background in special education helped a lot. I'm sure there's not enough time to teach all that, as well as regular academics, but they taught us about kids and tracking.

What do you mean by tracking?

When they're writing, when they're going left to right. Why do they go left to right, why walking a balance beam helps you read, why it helps bring all that mind together and help them get the center of equilibrium intact. You know, you go into a lot of, I guess it's more physical, because you're going to deal with children with special needs, where in a regular classroom, I think a lot of times they assume you should know that. And I think it should be included and make everyone take a special education course. Well, all that is is skin across the top of what may be, what can be, and I just think if you're going into elementary you need to have a lot more in depth of how the brain works, how the right and the left work together, what you could do to make that happen in class are several things. Little simple things you learn in Special Ed that you could do, workshops, make and take game workshops with teachers, and not depend on the computer, don't depend on ready made, because everybody doesn't have it, especially the inner city schools, for whatever reason, they get shafted. They just don't have the same, part of that could be economics, part of that is the PTA is stronger. PTAs have more to work with in the suburban schools where in the inner city schools they're barely getting up, getting themselves to school, you know you're not going to have mother come up there and volunteer for a fund raiser or carnival where you make money. So those schools sometimes are lacking quite a bit, basic materials, but if the teacher knows, "I can do this anyway", and doesn't come out with that glorified attitude "I'm gonna have all this in my classroom when I get there." No, you are not! You know, you think you draw all those bulletin boards and you run around and buy all that stuff for our classes, you have to do that sometimes in the real world, you have to purchase a lot of things on your own, and there's not a lot of payback either. They need to be aware of that. Some schools will have breaks, some schools will allow you money. Now we have the superintendent, which I love him for, every year he's been here we've had a lump sum of money to go spend anywhere of our choosing. I mean, you want to go to Wal-Mart and get all those things that you could, you go to the teacher's store, and, um, special services has received, I think I get a $150 and a regular classroom gets $200 to go buy classroom things. That's better than a raise to me, that is better than having an aid in my classroom, just to do something like that and, it gives the teacher a sense of, you know, somebody cares. Someone higher up believes I need these things. I have not heard of one person using the money unwisely. So I think that was good to instrument that. That's happened in this district, I don't know, anywhere else. It's all done by purchase orders so what ever we buy has to be written down and turned in so we can't say, you know, what they're getting, what not, but I think that's a myth you come out of college with.

<u>Speaking of expectations out of college with, was there anything you found surprising or something that surprised you?</u>

Well, you see, I came from inner city Detroit and nothing surprised me (laughs). I came from my school district and we had quite a bit and that is one reason I went into Special Ed. I was in the building with special needs kids, handicapped, you know, the whole thing, and they had a wing and we had a wing and we had quite a bit of things. One thing that surprised me, when I started teaching 30 years ago they didn't have PE teachers, music teachers. You see I started when you did all that in your classroom, and I

could not understand why the university made us take all those classes, "You will take elementary art, you take elementary music, and those kinds of things." What they taught wasn't enough, but it was enough to get you by. And academically, coming out, ... I wasn't really shocked at what I had to do as an educator. That really didn't surprise me that a lot was asked and little was given in return, it's always that one student that makes you come back, and you say "It was worth it the whole year just to see that little baby read or get that math, or feel so good about themselves that they'll continue." So that, I didn't have a lot of high expectations because I always knew I went into this field to help. I didn't go into it with the attitude that it's going to be glamorous, and I'm going to sit down to this wonderful desk, and I'm going to have all these cutsy things to play with.

No, I knew that if you want it done, you know, I did my student teaching over here at Hall (Elementary), which is about 2 or 3 blocks from here, and I knew that that lady, she made everything she had. And back then they had a whole 2 or 3 rooms, so we could go make make-and-take games. Special Ed had set up, what do we call it now, staff development. They had a staff development center where you could go and you could make the games at the school and do whatever, and that was a big help. And that's what I'd like to see happen even now is to have supervisors to get out to more of the buildings, because I had, I'll never forget her, Janet Ritter. She was as good as gold to me out there at Ranchville (Elementary) where I started and she came out, and she sat there and she was like, "This is how that should work", "This is how this should go" and it was like, no one showed you or told you how to put your teacher's guide, your hands on stuff, everything together to make it work. "I want to teach just this (alphabet) letter." You know, you take these long lesson plans in school how to teach that letter but no one sat there and told you "Go ahead and get the sandbox out along with this and this". I think all of that needs to be taught. And then if they still don't get it, see again, teaching different modalities. Teaching kids, they tell us, they give us a little test that shows us how we learn, they tell you that's out there. But to tell you how to bring it together, I think a lot more of that. They may be doing more of that now and I just haven't seen it.

In my Parent Ed classes I did a lot of that, and that's where I thought "This is what's needed". Then I have to hold those parent meetings, which we were doing at Talis (Elementary). We were having parent meetings, because I knew these people needed to know. There is a glitch missing here and if I could even get the grandma to come and let them know "Just take this pop bottle and glue these little beans on there and make the letters of the alphabet" you know, let those kids touch it, then let this kid make a word with all these pop bottles. And it was so funny, they're like "This is just too easy" and I said Huh? "That's all you have to do?" And just putting that salt in the tray and saying "This kid needs to touch it". You know, back then we started getting drug babies, the very beginning of them, and they had to do it that way in order to let that relate to their brain. See that's a lot of things that we learned in my Special Ed, is what will cause, and back then they would tell you, well it was, uh, the drugs that were prescribed by doctors, that we had all these deformed babies, this is why.

And now, its the drugs off the street and you're seeing those same kids come in and, I think teachers need to be trained on that awareness. The syndromes of a crack cocaine baby compared to an alcohol baby, they did a pretty good job showing you what alcohol and Downs syndrome, but now you have the marijuana babies that come in. They have no conscience. They will fight you in a heartbeat and hug you in the next

minute, and they have no remorse but they don't know why they don't. You know all this stuff you just learn through years of working with them like, "Mm hmm, we know now what's going on". And then, when a parent comes in and confirms it you know for sure what you're dealing with. I think that should be brought out. We shouldn't be afraid of it. We shouldn't be afraid to teach that to our teachers, if not in the classrooms and universities, in a seminar where they can go and actually work with kids like that so that they'll get a first hand experience. You just can't beat that, student teaching is not enough.

I've found whenever I know I'm going to have a special needs child in my classroom, it's scarey, then after I've dealt with a child on a breathing machine or with diabetes or whatever, then I'm ok.

Exactly,

But it's thinking about it and knowing that it's coming that's really scary.

It's like our pastor's sermon. He says attitude, attitude. He just spent a month in the Philippines, and came back, and he was saying, your attitude about getting to it before it ever happens. And that's it, and now all the asthma kids we have, we have asthma kids, we have Ritalin kids, we have the diabetes child that's in our school, and now we have the AIDS child that we don't even know about. We are getting trained on what to do if that happens. Everybody takes the blood path (Blood born pathogen training) in case that happens to you. But, we need to be trained on these asthma kids. We need to know before they get into a full blown asthma attack what's happening. We need to be really aware that the inhaler is in the office. You don't know half the time. Half the time you forget the PE teacher on your IEP, this kid has a medical problem, that needs to really be stressed, that the PE teacher needs to ask. They need to be trained, "I better make sure I get with my Special Ed teacher and the principal and I'm aware of a child that has a disability that's come to my classroom, before I start saying, "Come on lazy", "Come on Mr. Turtle Man, get on it", that that child can't do any better, they're in physical therapy. And we as Special Ed teachers have to become aware of that too. That PE teacher needs to know, the art teacher needs to know, because the children are going to all those pull-out programs. And they're sitting there, you know, depressed. And we get these kids back with no self esteem. It's because we'd communicate with our peers on that child's condition. But, there's a lot of children's medical conditions in our building in children that we never had before.

Talk about kids on Ritalin a little bit.

I have, I service three, I think. Two of them are on long extended time Ritalin, which means they take it in the morning and it lasts 6 to 7 hours and so they don't take one at school. I have one that I service that comes in that takes, the Ritalin, a half a pill. We work...they put him on another medication that kept him so active, it just worked against him. You know, and you have to go through this charting the behavior, you have to go through "Did they follow through, didn't they follow through". We have this school

rating scale we've made up that we'll do now that he's back on his regular Ritalin. Of course this child came to me with. He was a disaster case. He came in on three drugs and he was a kindergartner. They were going to place him in transition-first, they already had him in preschool, had him in kindergarten, they were going to put him in transition-first, and see if he could make it that way and they drugged him. He was on two tranquilizers and Ritalin. Now we want this child to function and they said he was what you called a floppy baby. That's what they told the mom. So he was in physical therapy, he was in occupational therapy, and I said something's wrong. So when he came to us I asked the mom to take him off everything except the Ritalin. I said if you want to keep him on that, I said just ask your doctor. Well, the doctor gave him the medication because she kept calling saying the teacher said, "He wouldn't sit still", the teacher said "He bothered everybody", the teacher said... . Now that he's on just the Ritalin I've had him two years, he's reading , he's doing his math, it has helped him, I've seen him off of it lately, and he is a child that needs some help keeping himself focused, keeping himself on task, and lot of that, though, I still believe is home life. I still, I really believe, that if this mother had known how to handle him he wouldn't need so much medication, now she's pregnant again. And this little boy's in second grade, and she's the mother that I want in my program. She's the mother that I want to say, "If you can come two or three times a week", we're gonna sit here, she is now working in Mother's Day Out at her church and she sees what her son is missing. She sees how they're helping him by working with 18 month old kids, 2 year olds what they have to do, and 3 year olds, which is gonna help her. But he does really well, the thing I hate, I just really hate the Ritalin but I know some kids need it.

And we have a 4th grader that I've been talking with. His mother worked with him at home, structured him at home, structured him in the car in the morning, he goes on in, he did real well. Now the mom is deceased and the father has no structure whatsoever. The grandmother's been working with him. They're in family counseling, and they decided for his sake he'll have go back on the Ritalin, because his classroom is not structured. He needs that structured environment. His classroom is a working classroom but the teacher is not structuring him. The teacher isn't going "Get this done, get that done..", "We're gonna write what we hear", "You guys, you can do this over here, and you can do...", and when you get to a teacher that has that kind of structure in her classroom it's hard for a child that is attention deficit or that just needs somebody to stay on him. What we used to call it years ago, it wasn't attention deficit. "You just need to put your thumb on him", well that worked if they knew the routine. Then they wouldn't have a problem, but if you varied from that routine that's the child you're like "Oh, I'm gonna kill him, gonna kill him" (laugh). But that's the way this little boy is. He goes in the room and everybody does what we call DARES (seatwork copied from the blackboard) in the morning, but then after that it's kind of "You guys are going to start this project over here and you're going to start this project over here" it's not across the board everybody can do... and that's just the way she teaches. And she teaches with a lot of centers and which you know that's great but for him it's a nightmare, it's too many decisions.

<u>So, kids are getting medication when maybe the structure of the classroom or the structure of the home might make medication unnecessary?</u>

Exactly. That is my gut feeling, and I do know there are kids that have problems. I do recognize that. But after you visit with that parent and you hear them talking, that child is a miniature parent. And if that parent is in disarray, is not sure where the car keys are, and "I'm just so busy", it's like that David Elkind's book *The Hurried Child.* If we've got parents like those kids, what do you expect them to do? All they know to do, and I learned that with my first child with his sleeping patterns. My girlfriend said "I'll keep him for you" she said, "He sleeps better when he's with her," 30 minutes he's up, here he goes again, he's up. And she said "What do you do all day?" She's an older woman, this is summer time, I wasn't teaching. I said "We go over here, we go over there, over here (laugh)". "Yeah, and that's what it is, he's not on a schedule". I said he doesn't really have to be, and she said, "For his sake he DOES have to be on a schedule in the summer time". School was no problem though. I took him to the sitter, she had him clock worked. Well when I got him, we went places, we didn't stay home. And that let me know right then that, I don't care what age, I mean he was like maybe 15 months old, barely a year old, he needs structure. Even if the structure is disarray-they know that, they know that's the way our life's gonna be. They need some form of structure. And that is what I started doing with him in his summer. I programmed myself to be around those certain times. Parents don't do that. They send that kid to school at 5 years old, and it's like now, it's the Christmas season, our afternoon kindergartners have been at the mall all morning, and when they come in at 12:30 p.m. they still have mall fever. They're sitting there going, excited, excited, excited, they got through eating that quick lunch, shoved it down them and shoved them in the door, and they're still going, their head's still swimming. So yes, we do that to kids. His book is excellent.

I remember getting afternoon kindergartners in after they had been out playing in the heat and I'm in an air-conditioned building when it's 110 degrees and they just lay on the floor.

That's what I used to say, I might as well not teach in the afternoons. There is no way, and then if you had one that had been in an air-conditioned building all morning and they come to your room where there is no air, about 1:15 p.m. their little body is asleep, they're melting. Now, how do you teach, how do you teach that? That was the most, I think, disappointing thing, was to try to teach that afternoon class, and they did get shafted because they couldn't function. I used to try to overload my mornings for that very reason , I said you know if I can do just 25 instead of 20 then those 5 can be saved until the school day changes, and of course by the time the school day changes its into the holidays. Then they have the holidays to mess with in the afternoon. And that's when years ago I used to put my older kids in the afternoons, all the time. If I could enroll the kids the way I wanted to then I put the older kids in the afternoons all the time. And then the younger ones came in the morning, and I would explain to parents "You know, look at that...." and invariably my older kids were reading by the end of, you know they could read, you didn't put it together. Because, I couldn't stand that, after they got all the skills. Now this summer they better be reading. It worked, that was a better system, opposed to just hodge-podging them around. Because yes, you're right, they just melted away, if they were on any of medication, they were just out, and back then they didn't tell you. They just said "oh well, forgive them", even give them cough medicine, they give that

dose of cough medicine, they were out of it. That is a real concern.

That's one of the things I learned, too. So one last question, you kind of touched on that a little bit already, what could universities do if they decide "OK, I realize teaching inner city is different and a lot of first year teachers are going to take those jobs because that's were the jobs are. How can we prepare them?

Let them have more on the job training, and by that I mean practicums where they'd have to go at least twice a week to see the kids in different settings. Let them do home visits with supervision to see what kind of home life the children are actually coming from so they can get a feel for how that kid feels, how that kid learns, and what they don't have at home to learn with. And, the type of parents they have. So that will take the fear out of them becoming an inner city teacher, and bring in real true-to-life people from the inner city that teach there, that have taught there, that have learned various skills to help them master that first year in that classroom with the bi-lingual, with the non-reader, with the person that has no idea what labels mean, has not seen a letter, the child that has not seen any academics what-so-ever, no formal education. They need to see that first hand, let them go to Head-Start programs, let them see what Head Start is doing to try to get that kid ready for school.

I think if they did some of that and made the multicultural workshops a lot longer, a lot more intense, if it has to go to two weekends, or if it has to go to a half a day, you know, for a week, something to let them realize the different cultures they'll be dealing with. Because no longer, what is his name, Will, Will Jackson, UCO, A Bold New World, we had to read that book in one of our courses, and I can hear him saying "No longer is it just a Caucasian world, you truly have a melting pot in public schools, and the minority is going to be the majority by the year 2000," and Sycamore is a school like that. I do the North Central accreditation, I am a chairperson and I have to do my ethnic population for the last 5 years and the decline is horrendous, and also our test scores, and the year we had a lot of mobility we could see that, that's something else that teachers need to be aware of, that they're going to have a lot of mobility.

People do not live in the same neighborhood for 10 years anymore. They need to be ready for that, they need to look themselves. They need to ask their classes, "How many of you live in that same house and your brothers and your sisters all go to the same elementary junior high and high school." It happens. People are unreal, those are corporate people, I mean they're moving in and in two years they're out, they're gone somewhere else or they've gone overseas, and we have to be ready to teach that child as well as the low spectrum child, the high achiever that has been across the world that has all that knowledge, you know, they have to be ready for that child, not take offense, that they do know more about France than you do in class, they lived there for two years. You know, why should I be upset because they need to tell me, and I think the more multicultural we do and not quote "Let me show you how to get along with people" type multicultural education. Now when we get to the in-depth multicultural life style the more comfortable we're going to become as educators, and I cannot stress enough they need to be first hand. They need to have a contact person in buildings come in, see what goes on, walk around and stay with a bilingual assistant for a day to see what they have to go through, our Vietnamese person with three languages that she's trying to deal with,

plus they have a slang just like we do. And she's like "I don't know this one!" We are so blessed to have a bilingual secretary this year because she helps with the Hispanic population so we don't alienate them, but by having her we have increased our population a great deal because they feel comfortable.

Yes, I heard her speaking with parents earlier.

That's right, so you know they're wanting to come. It's kind of like the Jehovah's Witnesses out there in the Talis and Stratton Elementary areas. I had all their kids, I had a whole church. I was like, "Well you make them feel so special". You know they don't feel, our kids don't feel like they're different, you know the way you handle that. I say, you know, the way I handle you is the way I can handle my faith because if I can teach your special thing, I can teach mine and that's why having all the cultures there and doing a Christmas around the world, everybody feels good about it. So it was so funny in a Talis district, "What another Jehovah's Witness? What is the deal?," instead of saying "Go sit in the hall while we do this", I just tell them, "Here's some paper, you sit at your seat, you make what you want to make while we go ahead and make our Christmas stuff ." But I think that, that alone would help. Especially our middle class American teachers that, that's where most of them are coming from that have that idea "This is a great job for the working mother" and it is, I mean they can still be a mom, they can still have a career, and they can still give back to society. But they need to know everybody doesn't get to teach in quote, "middle class, upper class" American schools. We just need to let them know that, and, they need to be aware that this is not TV, we do really have kids like this. Let me show you some children, kindergarten and pre-K that they keep in pre-K another year because they simply didn't have enough time to teach them everything in that half a day. I think, if I could say anything that would be it.

My feeling is that some of the gang and other trouble that kids are getting into is related to the fact that they're very capable very smart kids that take care of younger siblings, they get up they get dressed with no adult help, and then they come to school where they are made to feel stupid. The gangs appreciate their skills as a lookout or a runner and children get respect and esteem from the gang that may be missing in the classroom.

That's right, that's exactly right. We're not teaching them what we have. We're teaching them what we really, really want, which I don't have a problem with, but you also have to take a child where they are and work with them from there and move them up to where you want them to be. Don't come in there and say "Go home and learn all those spelling words, you study tonight" when they have to go home and watch, they have to go home and watch the other kids, they've got to go see about mom and dad because they are coming in drunk or high on crack, somebody has to see about the kids. So they do. You know, don't come in with that, don't say, "Go home and write a 3 page book report" - with what?! Don't tell them to go home and down load off the Internet. You know it's like in my daughter's school they assume that everybody knows it, No!, and they need to be aware of that. They need to be aware that every home in America doesn't have a computer, every home in America doesn't have crayons, and every home in America doesn't have a TV that's color. You're right, that is part of the problem,

instead of us taking the initiative to say "I'll show you how to work with what you have to get you where I want you to be," they go straight out to the street and lead that gang. And if we don't help them they'll just steal our cars and take our money out of the bank. Right, you hit the nail on the head. I do hope you get published.

Thank you, I'll see you again in a few weeks.

Merissa
Written Protocol
Written Between Interviews One and Two

Several years ago three brothers were enrolled in my school. The oldest one, Jessie, was evaluated first, in his second grade year. The second was evaluated in the first grade. Both boys received Special Education service.

The mother had very few academic skills. She had a tutor help her read the enrollment papers. She was working on her high school diploma.

The boys were very low in school work. They had a mother who couldn't read, write, or do math. She had a live-in boyfriend they hated at first. As time went on, the oldest boy became angry with life and school. He began to realize how low he was.

Their rent home was very bad. One night the middle boy was bitten by a mouse. All the boys slept in the same room. The state gave the mother a warning, but didn't take the boys.

The oldest boy became cruel to animals and people. Mother was unable to help him. She didn't know how. Several behaviors of his resulted in police action, and he was only eight. The mother was unable to handle the boys or know how to care for them. The state moved in and took all three. They were split up.

The last information I received was that the oldest boy was in a residential treatment center and the other two were in foster homes. The mother was attending parenting classes.

MERISSA
Interview #2
JANUARY 1999

For the narrative, I was writing about three boys I had one year, three brothers, and I'm trying to get the ages right. The oldest one I had he was eight, then there was one seven, and one four. Well, it was a single mom and she didn't realize that her kids were really...retarded. And when I visited with her the first couple of times, she said, "People think I don't work with them. I do work with them." Then she got SSI papers. I told her to come in and I'd help her with them. She'd sit there and say "I just can't do this." I said because you're not a reader? And she finally said, "No, I really, I just can't read, and people think I don't want to help my kids." And I asked her some history. I said did anyone, anyone do drugs of any kind? You know, not necessarily non-prescription. Then she said, "Well they daddy is in the nut house. He's in there for being crazy." I said, "Is he crazy, or is he mentally ill?" "He's mentally ill, and he goes to the VA all the time." So I'm wondering maybe this guy is a Vietnam person. Because she was young, and she had three boys, all three boys were retarded. One more emotional than the others. The oldest boy. That's so sad. So I work with him and work with him. I had a student teacher that was a minister getting his master's. He worked with him, tutoring him special, and trying to talk with this little boy. He was very violent, and he got even more violent. And it happened that while they were with us a mouse or a rat bit the middle sized boy on the lip. They all stay in this one bedroom together, in two beds and he said the little brother kept saying, "Get off me! get off me!" and by the time he turned the light on, and got over there to see about him, he said the rat had bit him on the lip and he had blood all over him. I said, "Did your mom take him to the doctor?" He said, "Nope." And he stayed out of school about two days, and I called her. Well, she didn't have a phone, so I wrote her a note and said he could be carrying something. Well she'd already been turned into DHS. Well DHS came out, checked them out, had her take the child to the doctor, and do all that, then another incident happened.

When we came back to school, they had taken the three boys from her. She was still working at Homeland, so I went to see her. She said, "Yes, I just want to get my boys back. I have to do it. I don't know how to do it. They say I don't know how to be a good parent." And talking with her, letting her know that parenting is something you learn. And if she didn't have that, which obviously she didn't, she was living with a guy, and he eventually stopped living with them. He was good for the oldest boy, because he would take Deonte to work with him. The guy worked on houses, a handyman, and Deonte would talk about it in his journal. He would tell me how they would go and use a saw and he couldn't do this, and he couldn't do that, but he could hold it, this way and that. So, I figured this is good.

He needs somebody to help him. Then the man worked on the rent house they were living in. It was rat infested; the landlord wouldn't come and clean it out. So he came and was putting up boards. Deonte said, "He put up boards all around our room after that happened." So I would imagine there were holes in the walls. It was sad. And then, when they went to foster homes, I had a foster parent call me ask me about the kids, because I asked where they were. I just want to know what happened to these little boys.

One was out in Lakeview and she said he gets in trouble on the bus. I said he's never had ridden a bus. And that to me, is the negative side of foster parenting, they had no clue he was retarded. They had no idea what this child's background was. She said they tried to have a reunion, and they were so violent at the reunion that they had to leave. I said were they violent, or were they just happy to see each other? I said you snatched three boys away from each other, and the oldest boy was always the defender and took care of everybody, since he was about five or six all he remembers is taking care of the boys. And you have to understand, when they get together, he still wants to do that. Well, it so happened the woman at Lakeview, I didn't talk to her very much. She called maybe two or three times. She'd say, "He's doing all right. He's getting along now that we know how to really work with him and help him." But the one that's eight, they put him in a residential treatment. He got so violent that the foster family, first, he went to two foster homes, and they finally had to put him there.

All these little kids, you work with them, we make sure they have shoes, and we get them food for the holidays...and just daily stuff like teaching that mother to get them up here for breakfast. They can eat it free. Get up and bring them. At one point, when I first met them she had a tutor to help her fill out the paperwork to get them enrolled in school. She then was going to school. We'd watch her get off the bus and walk down the street because our room was up front. I'd say, "Mom's going to school, you're going to school." That's when Deonte realized that he could not read. He could not do that math, and it's heartbreaking to see those little kids, and I wonder where he is now. And that is one reason I think I want to teach parenting classes so badly. It's parents like her that the system misses. You know, they had her a tutor to help her do academic stuff, and learn to read, but she doesn't know how to be a parent. She had these three kids back to back, all of them had the same father, so I'm thinking that at one point maybe she was with the dad for a while, and because of his mental illness, he was not able to stay and help them, and she was young, still in her twenties. That VA threw me. I figured he'd have to be a veteran, and that would make him older. Today, I wish I knew where they were. I wish I could find out where they were. You know the system shuts down and won't tell you anything.

<u>One nice thing they are doing with foster kids is that they are keeping scrapbooks that follow the children from place to place.</u>

Good.

<u>I just heard about that maybe a month ago.</u>

Good

<u>This way they will have tangible memories and pictures of their childhood.</u>

It's like they have no life, it just started when they walked in the door...No it didn't, and that's why I called that foster mother and I said, "You have to understand he has been there for his brothers and he is concerned for them. She said the middle child was not

doing anything in school. I said he can't. She said, "My other kids work, work, work." I said, "He can't read." She said, "Oh no... I said, He's social, he can do sociable things, but you sit him down, you talk to him about letters, sounds, about reading." I said, " I taught him how to write his name! When he got here in First Grade, he didn't know how to write his name." And a lot of it is no help at home, and Kindergarten just doesn't have time to do all that, they have too many other things to do. You work with him, and you'll see just where he is with his reading. It's not that he doesn't want to. Now the oldest boy stayed angry so much. A lot of that was... I talked to her a long time. She called me at home one evening and I talked to her a long time about having a boyfriend affecting her son. I said, "If he's a live in boyfriend, you might try having him not living in, but have him coming over and leaving so at least Deonte could see you still had time for him." And you know, I told her, "You're young. I know you want your own social life, but right now..." he was getting violent with her boyfriend. He was getting defiant in the house. Well that carries over to school. And I told her, I said, "You know last time we carried him out of the classroom." He was kicking and screaming and my student teacher was saying, "I know they tell us not to get involved, but I couldn't help it".. I said, "No, I needed help." This kid had big boots on, he was kicking the furniture, I had him by his arms dragging him out, and he grabbed this big kid and just picked him up. I said, "You get the boys from Boy's Ranch," and it just so happened he got my other little boy who was sent to Boy's Ranch that was going to his church. And that's how he got him and it's hard to believe these kids are in public school. And until you go through the system to get them some help... Those are two little boys I thought about. I would really like to know where they are.

<u>One thing that always gets me is that the kids get blamed when that kind of stuff happens. Even if mom's boyfriend's beating up on them, they act up at school, and people say, "What's wrong with this kid?"</u>

That's right. That's why I say more home life should be involved. Even when we test kids for special ed. I think we need to know more about the home life before we just say, "Oh, they're retarded, or they need LD (learning disabled) help." Well, a lot of it is emotional help that won't be picked up on ED (Emotionally Disturbed). And we've got a child that's just like... I'm telling you this child is culturally deprived. These children have never been exposed. I bring them into the LD lab and show them all this stuff that you'd think they should've had, kids are wonderful. And if you could test them out of...I get them out of lab, I don't like to keep them, and I try to do it before they leave fifth grade here, because once they get in Jr. high it's such a crutch. It's so easy to say, "Well, I'm lab, I can't do all that." So I do my best to get them out of lab before they leave here. If I know all it was was a cultural problem and now that they've got it, they need to go do some work. That little girl right now, she's the same in Spanish as she is in English. The only thing wrong with her: she's been babied, and I mean *severely* babied. This morning, her teacher says, "She can't do a thing. She won't do a thing. She took her pencil and coiled it up in her spiral notebook" I said, "No, take that pencil out of there, you're going to do this... and I had her tracing the date. I gave her paper to do: she sucked on her fingers, I said, "You're not doing it today, you're going to work." She had five or six

papers, and they were so easy, like find the ones that match, and she was just like, "aww!" and she can do it, you know. Here we've got this little girl labeled for four hours of special ed. And she's labeled from the Hispanic psychometrist: we had her come out and test her. And of course, she knows the same in English as she knows in Spanish, should know that. And that's why I say I've got to talk to these parents, conference with them, call them at home, before report cards and say, "You have got to stop that." I had another one like that, and that's what an assistant told me two years ago: "Either they baby their kids so much, and do for them, in that culture or they just don't do anything at all." We go too far on our spectrum; very rarely we have some that are just right down the middle. They either just don't do and we let them grow up, because they're cute, (laugh) or, we do too much (laugh) for them, then they're dependent and they can't cope. They become co-dependent. I thought this little Edina, I'm gonna get you today, I'm gonna get you, and she's so cute! You know and I hate to see her fall through the cracks, and that can be another child like that.

We are beginning to see our minorities in the majority, that's happening in this school a lot. And for them to keep labeling these kids, that's going to be an injustice. So those are my two babies I thought about writing about. I thought about some kids I had a Oakwood a lot. I was going through some pictures to hang up at home and I found a picture of this little girl, her mother paid somebody to murder her boyfriend. And I thought, there is Niki, and I saw that in the newspaper, I'm like "You've got to be kidding." This girl, at two years old, her real father tried to drown her in the bathtub. So she lost speech, no speech, just a frightening thing. And by the time I got her, she was in second or third grade, she was in my trainable room, the girl could do just about everything, but she couldn't talk. And they had labeled her trainable, and we worked on that. Her older sister used to come by and say, "She talked last night!". "She really got to talking!" And I thought, "This is good. This is good." I used to tell her, "Niki, you can do this." But again, she had to feel safe. She had to feel safe. And talking to that mother, "I gotta have a boyfriend" type-syndrome. And so this little girl was having these people influx in her house, as well as trying to be okay. I took them all home with me, I had six, and we had dinner, and we went to see Disney on Ice, that's what it was. I took them all to see that. And she came, the mother came, and she popped popcorn for the whole class. And I said, "They don't like you to bring this kind of food in." She said, "That's okay I've got a big purse in the car that I'm going to put all this in and take it." (laugh) And I mean she had more goodies! So it was like, you know, she cared about her kids, but it's the insecurity in her, that "I have to have a man in the house to make things work"-syndrome that causes her problems. And again, to get to the parents to make them feel secure will make the kids feel secure. And that little girl, I don't know where she is today. I thought about that when I saw her picture. Her mom's in jail, she didn't have a dad. And when all that happened she was about fourteen. So I'm hoping she doesn't have a family. She's another one that left an impression on me. Gosh those Oakwood kids. Oh my gosh, the big thing was, this one little boy came to school, he was just a hero because his mom had stabbed a guy last night. Out in the parking lot, Fourth of July. He was just bragging, "My momma got him. She got him good." I said that's nothing to be proud of. "Yes it is! Everybody was there watching my mom." "The police came, the neighbors came out." Well to him that was a big event,

That's where you get into to the whole values thing. That's not what school values.

It's street values.

So do you reject the street values or do you reject the school values?

That's right, when he can get all the publicity at home, on the streets, and at school, he can't read. And he knows he can't read. And that's where we have a problem with these kids leaving school, when they realize they can't. And then they just don't want to come. And the truancy laws help some, that's gotta help some. It helps some getting these kids back in school, but when they get to a certain point, they know they can't do it, and that's where Vo-Tech or a military-type setting would give them a reason to be important in school, where everybody's wearing uniforms, everybody's conforming to the same rules. You know, if the kids need physical marching, drilling, I think it's good. It would be good. I have one little boy who came back from a small town school, and I don't know what kid of school it was, but he wore a uniform, a fatigue uniform. His whole attitude about school has gotten better. His parents are, dad beats up on the mom at least twice a year, really good, and she leaves him. And now they're back. They left. This fight took place about October. And they brought him back, and now he's doing a little bit better. He's just, you know, it makes me angry, but his grades are better. He has a better attitude, so I'm wondering when he went down there, if that school didn't do something for him. When they called, I just said, "Yeah, he's been in lab, but I think he can put out a lot more than he's doing." If you have any male teachers, I think they just need to get on him, ride him, show him how important it is, and what he needs to do. He needs basic self esteem skills. So far he's doing pretty good. So far he is. We'll see.

Talk a little bit about what SSI is. You mentioned that earlier.

OK, SSI is a supplementary fund that they give to parents with children with special needs if they are impaired in any way. Used to be if you were just LD, you could get it. Now they've stiffened the regulations. You have to be emotionally disturbed, you have to be mentally retarded. Those children are a given, they are going to get some help. If you are an LD student, and like you come to me four hours a day, three hours a day, they consider that. It's a monthly supplement check that comes, but it's supposed to be for their schooling. It is supposed to be for a computer program, pay for a tutor, extra educational needs in the home. And one student here, SSI money paid for a van. And they bought the van to take him where he needs to get to go. The check can be as large as five to six hundred dollars a month.

Is that money given to the school then?

No it's given to the parent. It goes straight to the house. That's why when you have SSI money, you have a little more authority, as in workers to check up on the way the money's being spent. And a lot of times I recommend that I can write a letter to say

they need a typewriter, years ago it was a typewriters, now you say if they had a computer in the home, with good computer programs for that child, they'll go ahead and help them get that. That's what it is. The paperwork is horrendous. A lot of parents can't even read well enough to fill them out, so if they bring them to me, I'll help them fill them out. If they get rejected, I tell them it's usually because your child is not delayed enough, and you should be happy. Of course they want that dollar sign. (laugh) I say no, it's telling you that because of that child's IQ and the services that they're receiving, it's not enough to qualify. Because here in about the last three years they changed the qualifications. It used to be that any LD child could get it. I have another girl friend that I helped fill out the paperwork. One is eighteen now, so he won't get it any more, the other one went to school here, and he couldn't get it. And they both were lab students. I told her one was more severe than the other, that's why he got it, and it was the wording that the Jr. High teacher used to help that student as opposed to the other one. There were two different teachers there, and one that wrote the letter, you could tell, didn't even care about it. Didn't put in that he is in seventh grade reading on a second grade level, she just put, "He's below reading level." Well that could just been a year or something. But this little boy really did, and his mother would have really used that money for him. And when I see a family like that I try to help them. But that's what it is. It's a government supplement check for children. It's almost like a disability check for children, That's what I see it as. I don't know what branch, but it comes from government. You're doctor is the one that gives you he paperwork for SSI.

When you talking before about the parents who do everything for their children, it reminded me of a first grader I had whose parents would carry her to school, sit down at breakfast, cut up her food for her, and fed her bites.

Oh my gosh! That's like the Kindergartners, I wouldn't let the parents come in the room after two weeks. They would get upset, I said "Well, we're training your child here. You can't come in." Walk them to the door if you have to; and talking to the children worked better than talking to the parents. For the child to say, "I don't want you in here." You know, take their chair down, hang their coat up. I say, "No, not their job, it's you job. You're the person in my room, tell them you don't want them to come in." There's always one or two that just have to be there and tell the mothers, "Go do something for yourself. It's okay, I give you permission." (laughs) "Go do something for your self." I know that's a real hard thing, to cut the cord. And the empty nest syndrome. And I say, "Enjoy, you've been taking care of children all this time." And they don't know how bad that handicaps their children down the line.

One of the things you talked about kids being raised by the grandparents. How much of that do you see.

I'm beginning to see less of it. Therefore kids aren't being raised by anyone at all. A lot of grandmothers you used to have you don't have because if you the think about it, the ones who are supposed to be the grandmothers are still in the street. Because the children are so young that had the kids. Years ago, like my mother is still, well she's a

grandmother, but she's still in the workforce. But she's there when you need her, she'll take off work to take care of sick kids. She says, "I've made my mark." But to have one like that now is hard to find. I have a girlfriend now, she's my daughter's girlfriend, she lives with her mother now because she can't make it on her own. She's back home with a three year old, going to be four. The mother takes care of her. Well, she works two to eleven, so the child is there all day and all night with grandmother. Now this is a grandmother that this is the second set of kids. Because the first husband, those kids are thirty years old, and thirty five. Now here's this set and this girl's twenty, and she's the youngest of the second set. Now this grandmother's tired. She's very tired, but she has started a negative tradition with this daughter. Have these babies and not be married, and start the whole cycle all over. And her daughter's the same way. If she's living with a guy and he doesn't work out, a few months later she's living with another one. And here we go again. This child had two miscarriages, she's only twenty years old, and she has a four year old. It's sad. And now this grandmother is getting ready to move to Texas to get away from this. You see, before you had this grandmother saying, I'm going to stay here and help you raise these kids, because in their standards, "If I help you, then you'll be on your own." "You know, I won't have to take care of you all your life." "If I can help you get your job established..." That network is not there. Its not there like it used to be. There are grandparents in place, but it's like some of the grandparents here are very young. I believe that's part of our dilemma. At another school where I worked, those grandparents were older, took care of them, raised them, their grand kids are my kids age.

It's like me being a grandmother (laugh). I don't have time for that. My husband has grand kids, my daughter-in-law's mad at me now, because we didn't take all that time over Christmas holidays and keep those grand kids. I'm not that kind of a grandmother. I'm still raising my kids, and I am still in the workforce, and when I get days off, I have things I need to do. It's not that I don't see them, but her idea of grandmother is like her mother who is retired. Who is not working. Who is sitting at home. Who is the babysitter. She babysits all the grand kids because they don't want them in day care. Now my kids all went to day care, so that doesn't bother me. I checked up on them at day care. So what she's having a conflict with is the definition of grandmother. I just don't fit it. That's just driving her nuts! (laugh) She is just having a fit! She calls and says, "Um, Grandparent Day is Friday at school and you go and eat lunch with the kids at school." I say, "Well the Union is sending me out of town, I'm going to Kansas." She said, "What?!" And that's what the dilemma is, grandparents are my age and younger. They still have their lives that they're dealing with. So they can't stay home. That culture is missing to the point that we see kids that nobody is raising. That's what's happening here, nobody is raising the kids, that's depressing.

Is there anything else you want to add? We can still e-mail.

Yeah my kids have been showing me. "This is all you do." I say, "Y'all get out of my way and let me do it." What is the title of your paper?

Thoughtful Pedagogy in Inner City Classrooms. What I want to do is let people know what it's like to teach in an inner city school. Some of the challenges teachers face. What other people don't know about.

It's like my husband was saying... Oh Martin Luther King was on yesterday. They were saying you need to come support this. I said, "I've seen it three times. That's not a good one. That's an old movie." They've already seen it, and other people are important besides Martin Luther King, and I sure certainly hope they talk about them here at my school. The PTA president came by and said what are you going to do for black history? I said I do a panel of black people, men and women in jobs you wouldn't think they would have. I try to find them in this city. Well, I've been doing it for five or six years now, and I've almost ran out of people, It's sad. I'm like I need some more black people that these kids can look toward. A teacher that used to be here, he always did African stuff. I told him, that's not a problem. You do yours, because we're the results of what happened there. And he couldn't stand it. He was upset. He wanted them to know. And he had white kids dressed in paper skirts running down the isle with these big spears singing from Africa to the United States. I'm like, "I don't think so," (laugh) there is something wrong with this picture. And parents are totally upset here, angry to see their kids dressed like that. No shirts on, the guys didn't. Have these little skirts they had made out of paper, running up and down, and the girls singing these little African songs. And I think, that is not about African History for me. I think they need to be aware that it's there, but I think we need to focus more on what has happened. What changes are taking place because of that history. And a lot of blacks don't know that history. That's true. That's what I was telling him, give a full picture. You know my husband grew up in Dallas when they had real prejudice. I grew up in the North so I never got it. He could not fathom that. He said, "You mean you to tell me you didn't have drinking fountains that said, 'colored' and drinking fountains that said 'white'?" I said, "No, see you have to understand it was free slaves that went North while you were still down here in this bondage thing."

Growing up in inner city schools, I went to integrated schools my entire life. I hit a black school in college and had a nervous break down. I could not handle it. It was totally bizarre to me. And my kids will not go to a black college. My son went to a black college for a year, and it was the best thing for him because it was a small college, but the culture in the dorm drove him crazy. He was not used to that music. He was not used to the dialogue. He was not used to people not caring, and he saw a lot of that down there, and would say, "I can't believe that." But then the other side of that was he met other men like him from divorced single parent homes, dads that are real important people but not taking time for me. (laugh) And he would call me and say, "I am not alone." But about the prejudices, my husband talked about he didn't get his education as good as the white school. I said ours was all together. I said we had prejudice, don't get me wrong, but as far as blatant, out and out, North just didn't have it. We just didn't have it. "I just can't believe that!" And this was a big discussion in the house. And like I told my kids, they've never had that. They've never gone to a predominantly black school or to a white, it's always been an integrated school their entire life. So for them to go to a black college would be a challenge because it is a different culture and it is a different mind set.

And some of your black colleges still believe the white man is the enemy. I said now when you teach that, and you go on a job interview, and there's a white man interviewing you, how are you going to respond? You don't have any clue. You're sitting there with fear. Why am I here anyway? That attitude? And we've got to get rid of that. That has got to cease.

I see your next class is arriving.

Yes, here they are.

Thank you for your time, and please call and e-mail if you think of other things that you want to add.

APPENDIX E

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

DATE: 10-21-98 **IRB #: ED-99-033**

Proposal Title: MAKING A DIFFERENCE: THOUGHTFUL PEDAGOGY IN THE INNER CITY CLASSROOM

Principal Investigator(s): Kathryn Castle, Laura Hines

Reviewed and Processed as: Expedited

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

Signature: Carol Olson (CO) Date: October 28, 1998

Carol Olson, Director of University Research Compliance
cc: Laura Hines

Approvals are valid for one calendar year, after which time a request for continuation must be submitted. Any modification to the research project approved by the IRB must be submitted for approval. Approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. Expedited and exempt projects may be reviewed by the full Institutional Review Board.

VITA

Laura Hines Wilhelm

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Dissertation: THOUGHTFUL PEDAGOGY IN THE INNER CITY CLASSROOM

Major Field: Curriculum and Instruction

Biographical:

Education: Graduated from Tuttle High, Tuttle, Oklahoma in May 1984; received a Bachelor of Science degree in Early Childhood Education from the University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, Oklahoma in December 1988; received a Master of Education degree from the University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, Oklahoma in July 1992. Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree at Oklahoma State University in July 1999.

Experience: Taught kindergarten in Oklahoma City schools at Rockwood and Coolidge Elementaries, December 1988 to May 1989; taught kindergarten in Austin, Texas at Oak Springs Elementary, August 1989 to May 1990; taught pre-kindergarten in Oklahoma City at Rockwood Elementary, August 1990 to May 1992; taught first grade in Lawton, Oklahoma at Jefferson Elementary, August 1992 to May 1993; taught kindergarten in Oklahoma City at Polk Elementary, August 1993 to May 1995. Employed as adjunct faculty, University of Central Oklahoma, January 1995 to July 1996; employed as graduate assistant, Oklahoma State University, August 1995 to May 1996; employed as director of Child Development Laboratories at Oklahoma State University, August 1996 to June 1999.

Professional Memberships: National Association for the Education of Young Children. Southern Early Childhood Association. Early Childhood Association of Oklahoma